

THREE DAUGHTERS



JANE DASHWOOD

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By Jane Dashwood

WHAT the girls of 1900 thought of their elders, the Victorian generation, how they grew up, and became in turn elders, regarded with affectionate and scornful pity by the girls of 1929, is the theme of this witty, delicate, and charming first novel by a young English writer.

Lady Pomfret, Victorian of the Victorians, has three daughters, all very lovable, very whimsical, eager for love and romance. They seem so young, so modern, so alive, and so amusing, these girls, that it is with a shock that one sees that, twenty years later, they have become exactly like their parents. As their mother was shocked at them, so they shudder at Sex Appeal and the New Poetry. The intuition, humor, and whimsicality of this novel will delight both men and women.

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JANE DASHWOOD

To Riverside 3/1/39



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BY
JANE DASHWOOD



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PART ONE

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PART ONE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE FAMILY

'DON'T get up,' said Lady Pomfret, throwing open the schoolroom door, and standing, an imposing figure, in the doorway, 'but remember, please, that Miss Bass will be here at six and that I want to speak to her on her way up. I shan't keep her a minute, so be ready. Where's Judy?'

Lydia and Miranda had risen at their mother's approach. Lydia slid a book rapidly behind the cushion, put a hand nervously to her hair, and assumed an expression of polite alacrity.

'Having her bath,' she replied, adding in a tone of concern, 'I'm afraid Rosalie hasn't sent the dress yet.'

'Faithless wretch!' cried Lady Pomfret. 'She shall have a good blowing up. However, if it's not here in half an hour, I'll send William in a hansom. Now, Miranda,' she continued more smoothly, 'I've put you next your father to-night, so please chatter and make yourself agreeable — your father does so dislike silence. Lydia' — her voice took on an accent of elaborate unconcern — 'you will go in with Mr. Paynton. I hope that meets with your approval?'

'Quite, thanks,' said Lydia hurriedly.

'Was that the bell? I must fly! Bless you: be ready in time.'

With their mother's departure, the girls resumed their seats, their normal expressions, and their conversation. Lydia replaced her feet on the fire-guard and took her book from behind the cushion.

'I couldn't live there!' she remarked. 'No puddings or sweets; the only music, marches and hymn tunes, and all the plays to be about good people. How can you like it?'

'I don't say I do like it,' returned Miranda, 'but I can admire it.'

'And no poetry, or parties, or home of your own? And having to appear before your partners in hideous, unbecoming gym. dress?'

'Dress was to be omitted altogether,' Miranda observed.

'Well, that's more unbecoming still. No, I make you a present of your Republic!'

They were discussing Plato, which they read by stealth; philosophy being one of the subjects which Lady Pomfret, with a sound instinct, discouraged.

'As for the difference between the sexes —' began Lydia. But they had already settled the difference between the sexes: women were nicer; men more important.

Miranda had her eye on the clock.

'Hadn't you better be going?' she remarked.

'Right!' cried Lydia, tossing Plato into the air. 'Oh, darling, how I wish you were coming, too! Are you sure you don't want to?'

'Quite,' said Miranda steadily.

While Lydia ran upstairs three steps at a time, singing at the top of her voice, Miranda, who, though personally unaffected, shared the common anxiety, looked down the well of the staircase. No sign of life. But the distant sound of servants' voices, the clash of crockery, and a slight smell of

cooking issuing from the basement warned her of an immediate and painful duty. Miranda sighed; nevertheless, it was, at least, more humane to whistle down the speaking-tube than to ring, as her mother would sometimes ring, her fingers pressed firmly on the bell, till a panting parlour-maid, her hand on her heart, ran up two flights of stairs to be told severely that the door at the top of the basement stairs must be kept *shut*.

At eighteen Miranda was already a beautiful woman. Tall, fair, broad-shouldered and nobly curved, with regular Hellenic features over which an expression of virginal purity lay like a light touch of frost on a May morning, she looked like Juno escaped from a convent. A deep-seated shyness, which wore the mask of austerity, made her sometimes appear formidable to the young men whom she met at dances. But the sweetness of her eyes, the tender curves of her mouth, and the beautiful blush which spread over her face whenever she spoke, testified to her quick susceptibility to feeling and to the compassion of her nature.

Lydia, meantime, had entered the bedroom which she shared with her sister Judy. It was a large room, upholstered by Morris, lighted by half a dozen candles and warmed by a bright coal fire. A big wire guard, the relic of nursery days, still stood before the fire; but the two hip-baths (with a screen placed between them to preserve the sisters' modesty), which, regularly morning and evening, had been filled with cans of hot water brought up from the floor below, had been banished to the attics after the advent of the bathroom three years previously.

A young girl in a blue dressing-jacket, a comb in her hand, sat before the looking-glass.

'Any hope?' she asked tensely, as her sister entered.

'I'm afraid not yet, darling,' replied Lydia anxiously, 'but it will be all right. The telegram must have reached her an hour ago, and if it doesn't come soon, mother is going to send William in a hansom.'

Judy said nothing. Rosalie had played them this trick before. A genius, whose supreme elegance barely atoned for her wicked prices and cruel unpunctuality, she had kept Lady Pomfret and the carriage waiting three-quarters of an hour for Miranda's presentation dress, and had nearly ruined Lydia's first visit to Oxford in Commemoration Week by sending her pink chiffon the day after the Baliol Ball.

Judy's magnificent hair, of a dark coppery brown, hung far below her waist. The light gleamed on her milk-white neck, her starry blue eyes, and the clear-cut features of her proud little face. The prettiest and most brilliant of the three sisters, Judy inherited something of Lady Pomfret's imperious spirit, and accepted as naturally as a queen the devotion of her mother, the respect of the servants, and the dog-like adoration which her sister Lydia had bestowed on her since earliest childhood. Judy, as her mother fondly owned, had Character. Better still, she joined to it the unusual attribute of a Head. Alone among her contemporaries she read the newspaper. Without hesitation she could give the batting averages and second initials of every member of the Oxford and Cambridge elevens, place correctly all the ministers of the Government, quote the Bank rate, state the average rainfall, and criticize the errors of Mr. Chamberlain's Colonial Policy. Passing examinations with rapidity and distinction, and studying biology for amusement, she could easily, had she wished, have entered into one of those careers that were even then becoming a possibility for the daughters of the well-to-do. But although she conducted

with briskness and efficiency a hygienic campaign into the heart of Bermondsey — holding a dozen medical officers, a score of sanitary engineers, and the head of the Bermondsey Health Society himself, in the hollow of her hand — Judy's small hand, predestined for a coronet, was not to be deflected to the channels of merely professional glory. In vain did Dr. Allaby implore her, almost on his knees, to accept as permanent the presidentship of the local committee: his entreaties were as idle as those of poor Bobby Grant, who sent her neat but despondent poems every week from behind the counters of the Nottingham and Derby Bank; or of little Paul Trotter, who pursued her from dance to dance, laying his heart, his Zingari blazer, and the distant prospect of a house-mastership at Eton at her feet. Although temperamentally kind and accommodating, Judy's principles held firm. 'I shall marry an eldest son,' she told her sisters laughingly — 'I don't particularly care which!'

There was a tap at the door, and Miss Bass, the hair-dresser, entered discreetly, carrying a handbag.

'Her ladyship thought you'd like your hair done quite simply, low down on the neck,' she said, while unpacking her tools and lighting her spirit stove, 'and she has sent you her seed-pearl necklace and ornaments.'

The waxy petals of a gardenia lay on the dressing-table.

'This has been given to me,' said Judy with a pretty blush. 'I can have the ornaments on my dress, and perhaps you'll stick this in on the side.'

Miss Bass's clever fingers, waving, coiling, pressing, patting, worked at the elaboration of Judy's head, which its owner surveyed in the glass with a satisfaction which would have been perfect but for the deep anxiety which oppressed her. Yet no sigh of perturbation marred her countenance.

Judy had Character; Judy could endure courageously and without fuss.

A tiny piping cry — ‘Cooee! Cooee!’ — and a vague scratching on the door preceded the entrance of a small figure clad in a check coat and skirt, with a heavy velvet toque placed at a rakish angle on her short grey hair, and a propitiatory smile on her face.

‘Couldn’t find the door!’ she complained in a faint sibilant voice, ‘and your mother never will have a night-light on the landing — so useful and quite inexpensive. Well, ducky — good-evening Miss Bass — I thought I must just have a peep at you before I go off for the meeting of the S.R.O.B.H. — surely that’s singeing, Miss Bass? — there’s bound to be a crowd.’

She bent down to peck her niece’s cheek, when suddenly her features contracted in an expression of sharp dismay. ‘Ah!’ she exclaimed, drawing in her breath with a hissing sound — ‘that’s not a gardenia, my darling, surely?’

‘Yes, Miss Stephen; it does give a finish, doesn’t it?’ replied the hair-dresser, proudly surveying her handiwork.

‘But they’re so wickedly extrav.!’ moaned Miss Stephen. ‘Really, that is reckless of your mother!’

‘It wasn’t Mother,’ remarked Judy.

‘Well, if your Cousin Agnes likes to throw her money about!’ sighed Miss Stephen. ‘All the same, it’s dreadful to think what they cost with all this unemployment about. Yesterday at Hoxton I found a poor girl with no fire and a baby coming and her man O.W., and — think of it, darling — hardly a vestige of underclo. on under her mack!’

Judy, putting down her hand-glass, remarked briskly that she would think of it another time. Their Aunt Minnie’s small presence affected the inmates of Conyngham Place

with that faint uneasiness which is roused by the humming of a mosquito. With none but benevolent intentions towards the whole human race, she nevertheless contrived to vex and depress every member of the family to whose interests she was unselfishly devoted. She could drive Sir Caradoc Pomfret, whose Eustachian tubes were sensitive, into an attack of hay fever at any season of the year, whilst her visits produced on her sister a strong displeasure, the effects of which reverberated on the household for days afterwards. Aunt Minnie's parsimony, which she carried even to the curtailing of her syllables, obliged her to live under conditions which Lady Pomfret described as 'filth and squalor,' sharing a house with four other women in the dingy district of Notting Hill Square. Yet she kept a number of aged persons regularly supplied with cocoa and carbolic soap, subscribed generously to all good causes, and tipped her nieces handsomely every birthday and Christmas.

At this moment Marthe, the French maid, opened the door and, carrying with her a large bandbox, announced in tones of triumph — 'Elle est venue!'

Judy gave a little gasp of relief, Lydia a cry of joy, and Miss Bass dropped her tongs and said, 'Well, I never!'

Judy was saved.

Downstairs to the large double drawing-room tripped Lydia and Judy, their fans and gloves in their hands, the tails of their gowns on their arms. It was a tradition at No. 47 Conyngham Place that on special occasions the entire staff should be allowed a private view of the young ladies. Such an occasion was the present. Mrs. Munro-Preston, their cousin by marriage, was giving a *mi-carême* dance in honour of Judy's twentieth birthday. This Cousin Agnes, whose benevolence would descend on the family at

sudden unguessable moments, acted the part of a fairy godmother. The new dress and the bouquet of La France roses which Judy carried in her hand were both Cousin Agnes's gifts.

Judy's dress of white chiffon, fitting closely to the curves of her rounded young figure, broke out towards the knees into a series of tiny fluted tucks which rippled to the points of her toes and spread into a train behind. With arms and shoulders so white that they seemed to melt into her dress, and her faintly flushed, flower-like face uplifted in pride, she was Venus rising from the foam.

A subdued rustling and creaking proclaimed the arrival of the staff: Mrs. Bodymead the cook, with her mild, stolid face, Lizzie the red-haired kitchen-maid, Annie the house-maid, pretty and plump, Noble the Scotch parlour-maid, a treasure above, a terror below stairs, William the footman in puce-coloured livery, breathing, as usual, a little too loudly, and finally Old Maria, who had been Lady Pomfret's nurse, moustached and spectacled, with white ringlets after the fashion of 1840.

Respectful murmurs of applause, clickings of tongues, an audible 'Ow!' from Lizzie testified to the admiration of the basement.

'Well, I declare!' croaked Old Maria. 'Think of that now, Miss Effie. Who'd have thought to see your little gels grown up so fine!'

Old Maria's adored 'Miss Effie' surveyed her daughters with a fond, proud smile. Dressed in black velvet and old lace, her auburn hair, slightly streaked with grey, rolled high off her forehead, Lady Pomfret was a handsome and commanding figure. Stout but shapely, extremely erect, she belonged to an iron-backed generation who could stand up-

right interminably without fatigue, who never leaned back in a chair, and whose energies rose to their highest point at that hour of almost universal lethargy, immediately after lunch. Lady Pomfret's magnificent physique was, however, menaced by a mortal complaint; thus her naturally despotic temper received additional support from her privileges as invalid. On any point over which she and her husband might differ, Lady Pomfret, backed by the most eminent physicians in London, could invariably, over the chivalrous Sir Caradoc, gain her ends. 'I do not quite see eye to eye with my wife about this,' Sir Caradoc would explain politely to the landlord who had ventured to complain of Lady Pomfret's structural alterations, 'but in her state of health it might be fatal for her to be opposed.' It followed, therefore, that Lady Pomfret's splendid abilities, which would have made her an admirable matron of a hospital, or a successful administrator of a public office, found no outlet but in private life. In this realm, however, she was supreme. No house in London was more efficiently run, no children better dressed, more carefully washed, or more highly fed than hers. The little Pomfrets had been sent punctually every six months to the dentist; every three weeks to the hair-dresser; their toe-nails were cut on Fridays, their scalps rubbed with lotion on Wednesday nights; no day passed without their taking an hour and a half's exercise in Hyde Park or Kensington Gardens, while every Thursday afternoon they gyrated on the dining-room floor under the direction of a Swedish gymnast. With hygienic ideas in advance of her day, Lady Pomfret insisted on thorough and systematic ventilation; execrated the practice of putting up the shutters, and in the teeth of Aunt Minnie's protests had put in a bathroom on the third story. At her table the talk

was always good, the food better. Her poppadums, grassini, Bombay ducks, her famous almond mousse (a dozen eggs, four pints of cream), her rare and complicated salads, won her the respect of London's most fastidious gourmets. A good talker, with a strong grasp of the actual and a keen interest in politics, Lady Pomfret was at her best in company of eminent men and women of her own age and standing. With small children and sick persons the native kindness of her nature was instantly revealed, and about her personality always there was something vital, attractive, and compelling.

Lady Pomfret belonged bone and marrow to that great period of England's prosperity which was subsequently so much derided. With the nineteenth century just drawn to its close, the age still clung to the Victorian traditions of decency, refinement, and idealism. In tranquillity, the lady graced the drawing-room; in security, the horse ruled the road. Victorias, landaus, and high-swung barouches, with liveried coachmen and footmen sitting cross-armed on the box beside them, drove their wealthy occupants along the Ladies' Mile; high dog-carts spun along the country lanes; horse busses ambled through the London streets. The trailing-skirted, tight-waisted ladies of the comfortable classes, who would have been horrified to have been labelled 'women,' controlled large staffs of low-paid servants; and while a very few advanced parents believed in the Higher Education and sent their daughters to College, the vast majority educated them on lines of feminine accomplishment and kept them at home, there to wait gracefully for the advent of the husband. Self-sacrifice, good manners, and ignorance of the facts of life were the attributes most generally approved in young ladies. Over the conscience of the

bulk of England, Puritanism still retained its iron clutch, and in society the presence of the chaperon was considered as indispensable as her offices were, in fact, superfluous. Between the sexes formality reigned; natural friendships between unmarried men and women were rare; impropriety of conduct, unthinkable. Only a very small section of the advanced and intellectual attempted to put into practice the theory of the equality of the sexes; the vast majority agreed with Lady Pomfret, who, never having found any difficulty in getting her own way with men, strongly opposed the extension of the suffrage to women.

As the mother of three grown-up daughters, Lady Pomfret found herself in a difficult and delicate position. Difficult because it was her duty to find husbands for three portionless girls: delicate because her effort to fulfil this duty must be kept strictly concealed. Not for worlds would Lady Pomfret have confided to her friends her extreme anxiety to get the dear girls off, whilst any expression of the same desire on the part of the dear girls themselves would have been condemned by their mother as unmaidenly and coarse. Nevertheless, this secret ambition, shared by all mothers and daughters similarly situated, remained a secret to none.

The sound of a hansom drawing up at the front door and a ring at the bell scattered the domestics and caused Lady Pomfret to move to the fireplace and begin talking in those loud and leisurely accents adopted by good hostesses for the encouragement of oncoming guests.

'Mr. Pobbles and Mr. Padd!' announced William (whose ear was defective) as Mr. John Paynton and Mr. Walter Dadbury entered simultaneously.

The entry of Sir Thomas Chudleigh, M.P., was drowned by a series of loud reports. Sir Caradoc, his tie on one side,

a harassed expression on his face, came into the room, sneezing violently.

'Make your father put his tie straight,' murmured Lady Pomfret to Miranda, as Sir Caradoc shook hands; 'what's come over him?'

'Aunt Minnie,' whispered Miranda: 'I couldn't stop her. She went into the study on her way down.'

General Sir Caradoc Pomfret, a scholar, a gallant officer, and an able administrator, who, after a serious wound in the Soudan Campaign, had been permanently attached to the War Office, incurred much affection and some odium among his colleagues by reason of his pacific nature and liberal opinions, and in particular by his hearty disapproval of the South-African War. In the office he was considered something of a slave-driver; at home he was the passive subject of his wife. Only two things had he ever demanded — that the carpets should be left on the stairs when he was alone in the house in August, and that the tabasco sauce should be beside him on the table for his fish. It spoke for Lady Pomfret's devotion that both these requests were invariably fulfilled. If the tabasco were absent from the table, the bell would be instantly and indignantly rung; while 'Your dear father is so fidgety,' Lady Pomfret would complain, 'he says it depresses him to live in the house with the stair-carpets up; it seems to me fiddle, and means that all the cleaning has to be put back, but there!' — and the stair-carpets remained.

'Your aunt has been pestering me to sign some petition for rest homes for overworked bus horses,' said Sir Caradoc plaintively, as he took in Miranda to dinner. 'I told her that I had every sympathy with the cause, but as a permanent official I could not conscientiously put my signature

to anything of the nature of a party issue; and I reminded her that the Knackers' Union was strongly conservative.'

Meanwhile Walter Dadbury, known to his friends as 'Daddles,' a fair, pleasant-faced young man with a single eyeglass, the donor of the gardenia, was making himself agreeable to Judy. The son of Lady Georgina and Sir Trevor Dadbury, of Chilton Manor, Shropshire, an able and ambitious civil servant and a potential *parti*, his amiable manners and steady devotion to Judy made him generally acceptable in Conyngham Place.

'I have just thought of a new conversation game to play in trains,' he remarked. 'Let us assume that you and I are travelling together. Problem: how to make the other people in the compartment speak to us without speaking to them?'

'That's quite easy,' said Judy. 'You throw a fit and I take no notice.'

'My plan has the advantage of being more dignified and of putting no strain on the communication cord,' said Daddles. 'Say we are travelling on the Great Western. When we leave Staines, I turn to you and remark casually, "After this we don't stop again till York, do we?" You say decidedly, "No, not till York!"'

Lady Pomfret, over the soup, was exclaiming to Sir Thomas Chudleigh in tragic accents: 'The whole thing fills me with the most profound melancholy!'

Sir Thomas murmured, shaking his head: 'Methods of Barbarism!'

Sir Thomas Chudleigh, tall, handsome, and urbane, had the refinement of feature and dignity of bearing that is associated with red chalk drawings of the eighteen-fifties. As an early admirer of Lady Pomfret's and an affectionate

friend of her daughters, he stood to them in the position of adopted uncle.

Lady Pomfret looked across the table and clearly signalled to Miranda the command to 'talk!'

Turning to her father and speaking in the deliberate accents of conventional politeness, Miranda remarked: 'How the war drags on!'

From the other side Lydia took up the challenge.

'Capital cartoon of Kroojer in this week's "Punch"—have you seen it?' she asked.

'Yes,' said Miranda, 'I always see "Punch" when I go to the dentist.'

'What I say is,' said Lydia heavily, 'may God defend the right!'

'Yah! Pro-Boer!' replied Miranda.

The game of talking platitudes to each other as though they were strangers was one that amused the girls and their father. It was not, however, always perfectly understood by their guests. Mr. Paynton turned to Lydia in bewilderment.

'But I thought you were pro-Boers!' he exclaimed.

'So we are,' said Lydia, 'all rebels and traitors to a man. But just now we're being funny.'

'Oh, I see,' said Mr. Paynton. 'Of course, I see.'

Mr. John Paynton was Lydia's latest and most important conquest. As junior partner in the flourishing firm of Bracknell, Paynton and Company, this red-haired, well-set-up young man was something more than a prosperous ship-owner. His mother — a daughter of the famous philanthropist Wardle — was a remarkable woman, whose influence, although strongly anti-suffragist, was powerful enough in charitable and ecclesiastical circles to create a firm belief in the efficiency of feminine rule. Her only son, who greatly

revered his mother, cherished an ambition for a political career.

Lady Pomfret cast a glance of slight displeasure across the table. From her father, the Bishop of Boundel, a fashionable Evangelical preacher, whose uncompromising denunciations of the world and the flesh had attracted large congregations of the wealthy and the worldly, she had inherited a distrust of humour. In her own household, however, when outnumbered and overpowered she was obliged to submit to levity which she considered unbecoming and in bad taste.

The dinner was short, as the dance was early, and at nine-thirty Lady Pomfret and her daughters left in the brougham for Grosvenor Square. Sir Caradoc and Sir Thomas returned to the study, and Miranda went slowly upstairs.

It was not from the want of an invitation that she had remained at home. Since the occasion was exceptional, Lady Pomfret's rule might, for once, have been set aside. In general, not more than two daughters were allowed to attend a private dance or go to the regular official receptions at the Foreign Office, Devonshire House, Lansdowne House, and the like. But all three might go to subscription dances, and, since the traditions of the Royal Family were what Lady Pomfret called 'slightly middle-class,' all three might go to the balls and garden parties at Buckingham Palace. No: it was Miranda, by nature both unselfish and unsociable, who had refused Lydia's offer to stay behind in her place, and had insisted on remaining at home.

Left to herself, she stood hesitating before the schoolroom bookshelf. What should she read? The Life of Goethe? No, that was for after tea. Walter Pater? Too deli-

cate a writer for the winter. Better have a go at old Marcus Aurelius.

Sitting under the reading lamp, its green shade casting a cool light on her fair young face, Miranda opened her book and began to read:

Wipe out imagination: check desire, extinguish appetite, keep the ruling faculty in its own power.

A man's face, mobile, irregular, attractive, floated between her and the page.

'They might have sent poor Fish a card for Cousin Agnes's dance!' thought Miranda with a sigh. 'Mrs. Foster could so easily have taken him, or Lady Cotswold could have. But of course Mother would have sniffed at him.'

Thy present opinion founded on understanding, and thy present conduct directed to social good, and thy present disposition of contentment with everything that happens — that is enough.

... It was misery seeing him so seldom; more than a month now, since she had danced with him last. His step never suited hers and she always found it difficult to find anything to say to him. A pity that his name was Whiteing. A greater pity that he should have chosen to be an actor — one of the things like pork and margarine that her mother would never allow inside her house. . . . And yet, so little of an actor! Only three words in the first act and ten in the last. Hardly possible to predict from these the career of an Irving or a Forbes-Robertson. Still, his acting certainly improved as he went on: his delivery of 'I have orders not to allow your lordship to enter' being a good deal more dramatic than the more formal 'Dinner is served' in the first act.

It was hardly for her mother — who owing to bad health and Evangelical principles scarcely ever entered the theatre — but rather for herself — who thought most plays second-rate and had been driven to sit through this dreary performance three times — to object to poor Fish's profession. Nor need her mother complain of what she considered his light-mindedness. No; it was Miranda, who had always pictured herself as the wife of a man like Socrates or Sir Edward Grey, who had the right to feel aggrieved. Not that poor Fish was really light-minded; he was only amusing and Welsh. Nor was he really in the least Bohemian — often telling her how boring he found the green-room atmosphere and how much he disliked irregular meals; but since his ambition was to write plays, the best way of acquiring a thorough knowledge of the theatre was to be an actor first. If only his aunt would produce one of his plays! What was the use of being wealthy, childless, and eccentric if one never did anything adventurous! They were not bad plays either: 'Helen's Mother' was certainly sentimental — but the public liked sentimentality; 'Old Sir Bottlejohn' had undeniable possibilities as a farce. But of course as long as you were poor and unknown, no one ever held out a helping hand . . .

Consider that everything that happens, happens justly, and if thou observest carefully, thou wilt find it to be so.

Miranda closed the 'Meditations': she sighed and looked into the fire. In its glowing heat she saw visions which had often floated before her eyes . . .

An old red house in the country . . . a garden full of flowers. A pony cart with four children in it . . . Strolling to the woods to hear the nightingale. . . . Home to the dreaming house hand in hand . . .

With a crash a coal fell out of the fire and abruptly the house and its inmates vanished up the chimney. Miranda rose, put back Marcus Aurelius carefully in the bookshelf, turned down the lamp, and went to bed.

CHAPTER II

APRIL SHOWERS

WHILE Judy and Miranda had symmetrical faces, firm wills, and more than their share of good sense, Lydia's features were sketchily put together and her character (as her mother and governesses frequently informed her) was regrettably lacking in balance and self-control. The eldest of the three daughters in years, she was the youngest in nature. Mercurial and irresponsible, she leaned on her sisters, seeking their advice in everything. Doubtfully she would ask, 'What shoes shall I wear?' or, 'Shall I encourage Thorne-Davidson?' And Miranda would reply, 'Your bronze,' and Judy rap out, 'Hook him!' When forced to make a decision for herself Lydia would immediately afterwards repent. 'She really must not be so vacillating,' Judy would say sternly, as Lydia, with a distracted expression, gazed at her plate, having, as usual, made the wrong choice of pudding. The least pretty of the three, and believing herself less pretty than she was, Lydia took more pains to please than either of her sisters. Furtively she would powder her nose; still more furtively apply a lip-stick to her lips. This practice, which she knew was sinful — for only actresses or women of unmentionable character 'painted' — added to her private conviction of her moral worthlessness: whilst the frequent success with which her efforts were attended increased the confusion with which she beheld the universe.

For things wouldn't fit. The parts that Lydia loved most clashed incessantly with that world of order and conduct

and shopping which Lady Pomfret and (presumably) God had ordained for the best. And since escape from that world was happiness, she perpetually escaped, was perpetually caught and censured, and she carried about with her inevitably an obscure conviction of guilt.

The clash was continual, the shocks were acute.

Lydia might be dreaming over a book in her bedroom, or in the schoolroom alone, while through the open window the chirp of sparrows, the clip-clop of passing hansoms, and the distant strains of a barrel organ wove themselves into subtle symphony . . . Turgenev, Heine, 'Mariana in the Moated Grange.'—'Into my heart a wind that kills from yon far country blows.' Oh sweet, how sweet to remain entranced for ever in some such melancholy tender dream . . . 'Lydia! Come down at *once*! Mother says, did you remember to order the *prawns*? The prawns . . . ? Oh, horrors! . . .

Or playing the piano in the drawing-room alone. Passionate chords, an exquisite tone, round and full, *sostenuto* . . . there, make it sing! . . . Mother's voice on the stairs, hard and sharp . . . She comes in wearing her tightest expression, and obviously with a headache. 'Don't stop practising, child.' But how could one, how could one ever play a note with mother in the room? A few bars, uncertainly . . . 'Fifteen and carry nine . . . Either practise properly or stop; but pray don't strum!'

Then there was thinking, which naturally took up a good deal of time. . . . If tragedy were greater than comedy; whether instinct in insects was really intelligence atrophied by success; so that when human society became perfect every citizen would function automatically like Maeterlinck's bees? . . . The hope, uncertain but passionate, that

emotions roused by music, the scent of honeysuckle, by early morning in summer or by spring evenings when the lamp-lighter lit the street lamps one by one, might find complete fulfilment in life . . . The possibility that behind the conflicts and clashes of existence there might be some principle of unity; whether life had a meaning and a purpose; or if the earth were too small to matter — as it sometimes seemed when she looked at the stars.

Meanwhile the charge of 'never thinking' was irrefutable: for the trains of thought that rushed through her head led to no destination on her mother's time-table. Nor was 'using common sense' much help — for what happened when she tried to use it?

That muddle about Mother's stays, for instance. Ever since the beginning of time underclothes had been bought at Baldwin's: Mr. Baldwin saying what an honour it was to serve her ladyship and Miss Young perfectly understanding the necessity for extra strong whalebone. So when on Mother's shopping list was written, 'Félice, stays. Return pair; to be mended,' it was a mistake, surely, and not that terribly expensive place in Bond Street? It was impossible to ask Mother, who was lying down with a headache, and a good opportunity for exercising thoughtfulness . . . And it was not a mistake, and the split pair did come from Félice, and Mr. Baldwin had nearly cried, and Mother wouldn't listen to a word, and Heavens, how she had scolded!

Again there was the difficulty of talking before parents, or with parents alone. It was easy enough, when the girls were there, to make the twinkle come into Father's eye; easy to please him and draw him out; interesting always to listen while he talked about public affairs with Lord Podbury or about books with Professor Hawkesbury; and pleas-

ant to see him put his head on one side whenever Mother made a sweeping statement and cautiously observe, 'It may be so!' But what could one say to Father alone? For there was always the tendency to confuse exports with imports and the Lord Lieutenant with the Commander-in-Chief, the lack of grip on newspaper subjects, as well as the private suspicion that one slightly bored Father; so from nervousness came silence, which was, of course, a crime.

The intense strain of talking to Mother was only partially relieved by the fact that Mother preferred to do all the talking herself. Disliking jokes, dismissing ideas as silly, insisting on absolute accuracy — a habit of mind impossible to acquire — and down like a cart-load of bricks whenever one made a perfectly natural mistake, such as assuming that trains ran as usual on Good Friday ('A piece of ignorance,' she said, 'that would disgrace a child'); Mother cleaved to the Useful, which was dreary, or to the Improving, which was dangerous. And how difficult to deflect her to more amusing themes! . . . People? . . . Nonsense; that was mere silly gossip and she had known Martha Pusey since she was a child. Only very empty and foolish girls could think Sir Joseph Bigberry dull. Books? . . . Of course your father can read that kind of garbage, but it's a book I don't wish taken out of the study. . . . Clothes? . . . You seem sadly short of heavy winter combinations . . . I don't like your hair all over your face . . . You girls, all of you, think too much about your appearance. Remember, it is not your looks that people value you for, but Character, Conduct, Unselfishness. . . .

Then she listened in silence.

Yet away from Mother what fun it all was; how natural to talk, how easy to shine! Dining out with Father, when

Mother was ill. At the Paradynes; sitting next the Lord Chancellor. At first very formidable. Impressions of the Vandyck exhibition? Dismissed. Recollections of early childhood? A failure. Then suddenly, at the end of the fish, like a flash — Golf! ‘A new lease of life!’ How his face had shone!... And afterwards, ‘Your charming daughter’...

Or the Under-Secretary for something or other, with the thick black beard, who had gone on and on without stopping about Proportional Representation. ‘Of course! Yes, that makes it perfectly clear!’... and the ice was delicious and the conversation of the young author opposite most intriguing. ‘I shall remember all you’ve told me!’ with an epigram slipped in, bagged from Father. And next day Mother has a letter saying what a pleasure it had been to meet a member of the younger generation with a high political ideal.

Ladies were easier still. Listening to Mrs. Umphleby’s medical autobiography. Nauheim Baths... The winter in Madeira... ‘How terribly you must have suffered!’ Lady Faversham’s children. ‘But Lucinda is a *real* beauty!’ ‘Surely Maurice is *certain* to get a scholarship!’... ‘You must come and see me, my dear; any Wednesday, don’t forget!’ ‘I am counting on you to take your mother’s place next Friday; you must amuse the Ambassador!’

... A curious shade, that grown-up greenness; not like the crude apple-green of youth. No, Miranda said, it was more like the dining-room curtains — sage green — a dingy colour.

Grown-up people, of course, didn’t matter. They were only a background of fun for the Girls. It was the Girls, with whom one was always happy, with whom one laughed

and chattered the live-long day — it was the Girls who were life! Which was the prettiest, Judy or Miranda? Encircling their waists and bringing them face to face — ‘Oh Judy, isn’t Miranda lovely!’ ‘Miranda, don’t you think Judy the prettiest girl in the world?’ And Miranda would say with feigned contempt, ‘Personally I think her a little chocolate-boxy’; and Judy, ‘You know I never admire blondes!’ . . . Without the Girls, life was void, light faded, boredom enclosed one in fog . . . ‘Lydia, the Beaton-Belvoirs have asked you to stay at Crash for a fortnight; of course you’ll accept.’ ‘Oh, Mother — must I? They are so dull!’ . . . ‘You children mustn’t bunch so together; why don’t you make friends with Agnes Camper or Mary Pendlebury?’ ‘Oh, but Agnes Camper is so smart!’ ‘And Mary Pendlebury is so earnest!’ (Besides — how could one ever talk to friends with Mother in the room?)

With the Girls, the Universe and all its inhabitants were one magnificent joke. The people in the streets, the people at parties, Mother’s visitors, were fantastic beings designed for mockery and laughter. Who could take seriously, for instance, such a person as Lady Pounder, with her high nose, rabbit mouth, and heavy — ‘haw-haw’ manner, left over from Thackeray; or old Mr. Gibson who came to every tea party that was ever given and gave one himself of prodigious splendour in Berkeley Square once a year, but who possessed, apparently, no other interest or activity in life; or Mrs. Griggs, with her trick of muttering, ‘Little dogs, little dogs,’ under her breath? What did it matter what one said to them? They were nothing but a pack of cards!

Mother’s tea parties: making a match between Lord Podbury and Lady Pounder. Snatching away Francis Foljambe from pretty little Mrs. Foster and forcing him to talk to

Mary Pendlebury about the Sweated Industries. Mother's dinner parties: playing 'Robinson Crusoe' — the game invented by Walter Dadbury, with salted almonds for counters. Judy wins.

'I got Lord Podbury on to "Nebuchadnezzar" in five minutes by asking him whether it had been called Palestine Soup because the Jews were naturally vegetarians? He said he only knew of one vegetarian mentioned in the Old Testament — and there we were!'

'Just your luck having a religious man with an easy mouth! It was hopeless trying to make Ernest Worthington say "Helen of Troy." I asked him which famous woman of the past he would best have liked to take in to dinner and he answered "Elizabeth Fry," and stuck to Prison Reform for the rest of the evening.'

Dances . . . young men . . . more important. Yet even though to please them one spent so much time at the mirror, young men existed, for the most part, merely as mirrors of a more varied and flattering kind. In Thorne-Davidson's eyes one beheld a hard and glittering woman of the world; in Francis Foljambe's, 'a rosebud drenched in dew'; in little Smither's, the thoughtful countenance of an intellectual; in Sir Deighton Stuart's (probably) a chocolate cream.

These reflections, however, were serious; for masculine admiration was a girl's sole security against bankruptcy. The more admirers she attracted, the higher was her credit; even an ineligible represented cash in hand. But to desire further intimacy with the young men who revolved round her at dances or who talked politely on Sunday afternoons seemed as meaningless as to feel friendship for a Bank Stock or a Railway Share. Some day, no doubt she would have to marry, and before that (she hoped) she would fall in love —

fall in love with some one difficult and dangerous, like Rochester, or Hamlet, or Satan in 'Paradise Lost.' That supreme adventure lay ahead; and then, when the Girls married, she would marry too. But not just yet; she was too young, too uncertain of herself. Besides, there was the riddle of the Universe to be deciphered first.

Meanwhile the dullest partners stuck the closest: bores having the nature of burrs. The interesting young men who carried on long introspective conversations danced badly and generally went away early, while the beautiful ones who danced divinely flitted into one's life for a single evening and then, maddeningly, became engaged to some one else. Still there were the attentions of people whom Mother valued, like Francis Foljambe and Sir Deighton Stuart; and of course, Phelps.

Phelps, from having been an affliction, had suddenly turned into a Godsend. Standing about, looking dismal at every dance. Then one evening, because there were gaps on one's programme — 'What dance do you want?' 'I want them all!' And after that he had proposed. Disagreeable, awkward. But gratifying: particularly afterwards, because of Mother.

Nothing could have been more opportune: the fag-end of the season and the day after she had committed the most terrible crime (Mother's umbrella — a Brigg too, with an amber handle — borrowed and left behind in the Underground). And there was Mother with her severest expression saying: 'Your skirt is gaping open behind. Really if you can't dress yourself decently —' and the question had been which to confess first? Providence had decided. 'Oh, Mother, I think I ought to tell you —' a blush, a smirk, and out had come Phelps.

Extraordinary! Mother's expression had totally changed. 'My darling child!' and a most affectionate embrace. Off flew the umbrella, as light as thistle-down, with a mere — 'What a feather-pated child!' Then, 'Where are you going? The Mudie books? Oh, but Miss Beaver can do that. Run upstairs and put on your things and ask William to whistle for a hansom.' And then and there Mother had carried her off to Florinda's and bought her two lovely new hats.

But why had Phelps, from a nonentity without even a prefix — just 'Phelps' on one's programme, to be cut if a better man turned up — become suddenly 'Mandel Phelps, that nice wholesome lad'? What was he? Nothing! A man of straw . . . 'Straws,' said Miranda, 'show which way the wind blows.' 'Besides,' said Judy, 'isn't he heir to his uncle, the Bart?'

Anyhow, after Phelps she could have breakfast in bed whenever she had a slight headache, and a hansom to music lessons in wet weather. And she was a dear, sweet child and the most unselfish of them all. Unselfish. That was a score! Because there were rainy days (after reading 'Adam Bede' or 'Mark Rutherford') when it seemed definitely desirable to be good. Really Good . . . 'You've got the wrong face for it,' said Miranda, 'besides, bags I goodness.' And Judy, 'I shouldn't; it tends to dowdiness.'

Still, for a period, all was sunshine. No terrors. No shocks. Yet, such was the treacherous character of the Universe and the precarious state of morality, it didn't last! However one courted approval, however one strove to please, one couldn't keep good!

There came that terrible day when Mother had gone down to lunch looking as though she were in Church, and an

excellent imitation of Lady Pounder had been checked by a kick from Judy under the table; when, in the awful pause that followed the conclusion of the cheese and biscuits, Mother had said — ‘Come into the drawing-room, Lydia; I want to speak to you.’

There, in the drawing-room, where no one ever felt comfortable, at her writing-table, upright in her black and gold chair, sat Mother. Before her the accused stood and trembled.

‘I am shocked and appalled,’ Mother began, wearing her severest expression, ‘at the condition in which I found your room this morning. Ink stains all over your handkerchiefs, and a packet of peppermints stuck away among your gloves. That any child of mine should be such a slattern! If you must eat sweets — though it seems to me ridiculous and degrading at your age — you can at least keep them in the proper place. As for your dressing-table, Marthe says she finds it impossible to cope with all those bottles and jars, so I’ve made a clean sweep of them. Then there’s another thing — ’

Mother paused; straightened the blotter in front of her and assumed an expression of even deeper severity.

‘There’s another thing. If you must read *Filth*; if you have the kind of mind that takes pleasure in such things — I suppose some people really enjoy bad odours and disgusting sights! — you must at least ask your father’s permission before you take books out of the study. I found this in your bedroom.’

Before Mother on the writing-table lay a copy of ‘*Madame Bovary*.’

Heavens! how had it got there? It had been upstairs for months! . . . Hearing Professor Hawkesbury say one night

at dinner that Flaubert was the greatest master of prose style, and thinking that it would be nice to be able to say casually (because Professor Hawkesbury was charming), 'Oh, yes, I've read Flaubert!' 'Madame Bovary' had been taken up to bed. But how dull it was! Impossible to keep awake — and after a few pages had been tried it had never been opened again . . .

'Oh that! I've hardly looked at it. I — I mean Professor Hawkesbury said it was so good. He told me I ought to — I —'

No use. Mother didn't believe her. She never believed her. And because Mother didn't believe her, she began to exaggerate and even to tell lies . . . She said nothing, but just stood there, twisting her fingers and praying that the roof would fall in. While Mother went on and on . . . And it was impossible to answer, impossible to explain, because it was never any use, it would never, never be any use trying to explain to Mother . . .

'It's incredible to me,' Mother went on, settling back in her chair and warming to her work, 'it's incredible to me that a girl brought up as you have been with the highest examples before her can deliberately turn her back on all that's fine and prefer to wallow in the mud rather than live on the mountain tops. When I remember the teaching of my dear father ——'

And so the storm would roll on — sweeping over the Evangelical message of the late Bishop of Boundel — ranging over the great historic past of Mother's oh, so different girlhood — a girlhood capable, strenuous, high-minded, rich with virtues, accomplishments, sacrifices, opportunities, offers of marriage — roll on till it came to Lydia's unhappy character and disgraceful record: her greed, noticeable even

as an infant; her thefts in the nursery, lies in the schoolroom; her instability and the weakness of moral purpose that had made her governesses despair and had caused her parents to be wracked with anxiety — roll on, till it reached the future — the black and desperate future of a girl whom nobody valued, nobody would ever love — roll on, till with decks clean swept and masts torn away the unseaworthy vessel of Lydia's self-control capsized.

Only when the tears were rolling down in streams did Mother slacken and allow her forbidding expression to give way to her naturally kindly smile.

'Now, dear child,' she would say, taking out a handkerchief and applying it to dripping cheeks, 'do try and make a real effort for the future! There — remember what I have said and don't sob like that, there's a dear little goose —'

But the wreck could not all in a moment be salved; and upstairs behind locked doors the remainder of the ink-stained pocket-handkerchiefs were soaked with hopeless tears.

Not till many days after did a far-off gleam flicker on the dark horizon. Perhaps in some unreachable universe there might be other standards than those of Mother's. There might even be people for whom a disorderly bedroom would appear bad, of course, yet not wholly criminal; people who enjoyed the French classics, philosophy, and peppermint creams; who put their feet on the fireguard, made muddles of messages, and smiled to themselves in trains. In such a world she might not be wholly damned. But if it existed would she ever find it? The world into which she had been born and lived, would always be, had always been Mother's.

. . . And how could she possibly guess that there might be another cause, besides untidiness and '*Madame Bovary*,' for Mother's displeasure?

Only Miranda (who knew everything) or Judy (who read the newspapers) could have associated it with a paragraph which had appeared that day in the 'Morning Post,' announcing the engagement of the Honourable Francis Ffulkes Foljambe with the daughter of one of Mother's oldest friends.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATION

THE morning after the Munro-Preston dance Miranda joined her sisters at their late breakfast.

'Well, was it fun?' she asked.

'Ripping!' answered Judith. 'Iff's band and the most heavenly ices. Only there were rather too many men.'

'As a matter of fact,' said Lydia, pouring herself out some tea, 'there weren't quite enough. But you know what happens when Judy comes into a ball-room — there's a rush and a buzz and a huge crowd settles round her like a swarm of bees. And let me tell you, Judy — you cad, you've taken all the butter — that it's making you highly unpopular. The weaker ones kept coming up to me with their grievances. Chevenix went on grumbling for hours about the tiny chip of a valse that he had to share with three others, Paul Trotter complained that you had cut his dance, and poor Bobby Grant told me with tears in his eyes that he had come all the way from Croydon on purpose to dance with you and that you had only let him give you a glass of lemonade. There was bitter feeling among the girls too; you should have seen the glances of fury that were darted at you by the wallflowers as you bagged all their partners.'

'Poor little Bobby!' murmured Judy. 'But I couldn't help it — my programme was full up before I came. Chevenix is getting really silly. Oh, girls,' she continued with animation, 'what do you think of Peter Goring — my latest? Such a pet!'

'Was he that tall, queer-looking, rather beautiful creature who looked as if he danced well?' said Lydia. 'Why wasn't he introduced to *me*?'

'He dances divinely,' said Judy. 'He's in the Guards but he says he hates it. The only thing he wants to do is to wander round the world with a hammer and a zither. One of his ancestors was a pioneer and another a Hungarian gipsy —'

'Oh, and did you ask him whether he could sing those lovely Tzigoni songs and if he could dance the Csardas?' cried Lydia eagerly.

'As a matter of fact,' said Judy, who was not musical, 'we talked about marine crustacea. He said he preferred dry land animals as they had more Character. But I said, on the contrary, didn't he know that the sea-urchin walked on the tips of his teeth, that the right hand of the sea-anemone did not know what its left hand did, and that even the sponge answered back? He said no doubt that was why his father disliked sponges and would never wash with anything but a loofer.'

'Isn't his father dotty?' asked Miranda. 'I heard he shot every one who came into his park at sight.'

'Only cyclists,' said Judy. 'But it's true that he's called the mad Lord Rendall and his will has never been crossed. None of the boys were allowed to go to school and they say his wife died because she wanted a window open and he wanted it shut.'

'What happened to the window?' asked Miranda.

'Oh they had to have another one put in. And Humphreys-Drew was their tutor; they called him "the hideous Hum" out of Milton's Nativity Ode, and he seems to have been the only one their father didn't break.'

'I rather like old Hum,' said Lydia musingly. 'Cambridge of course, and a shocking dancer, but he reads Henry James. We sat out the Lancers and discussed his later manner. Oh! and did you know he had rooms with Julian Carr?'

'Yes,' said Judy, 'I know all about him. I know he's got a dog called Crompton. I know his birthday's in March. I know he can't touch pears ——'

'Was Julian Carr there?' interrupted Miranda.

'Yes,' said Lydia, helping herself to honey, 'and do you know what I did to him? A strong and singular thing.'

'Proposed?' inquired Miranda.

'Stronger,' said Lydia, 'I cut his dance.'

'Indeed,' said Miranda, 'and why?'

'Well,' said Lydia, spreading her toast (which she did childishly all over, instead of in little bits at a time), 'I felt the moment had come for some display of character. You see, he has never in his life asked me for more than two dances, sometimes for only one. And he's so terribly difficult and superior, and he must know I admire him tremendously, and it's rather humiliating, and anyway some one else wanted it, and it's my theory that people who want things ought to have them.'

'I don't think you should have cut him,' interposed Miranda, 'he's fearfully sensitive.'

'Oh, but he couldn't mind me,' said Lydia, 'he despises me too completely.'

'That may be,' returned Miranda, 'but he might feel it as a slight none the less. He's rather on the look-out for such things ——'

'What makes him so odd and difficult?' asked Lydia with interest.

'Well, he's dog-poor, for one thing, and Mother says his father's a butler.'

'Not a butler,' corrected Judy, 'an undertaker in the Harrow Road.'

'Well, but he got a double first and any amount of pots and looks like a king,' said Lydia with some warmth. 'Why need he bother about his father?'

'No one denies that he has brains, beauty, and distinction,' observed Miranda, 'but a father is the kind of thing people do bother about. He's never asked here, for one thing.'

'Is that why?' cried Lydia in astonishment. 'How very odd! When I once suggested timidly to mother that we might send him a card for the Fox-Davies's dance she made a face as though she were spitting out pips and said "Somehow I never much like that young man, I can't think why."

'I can,' said Miranda dryly.

Lydia was silent for a moment. If she had known that Julian Carr came of what was called 'quite humble people,' she would never have cut his dance for Mr. Paynton.

'Well, anyhow it can't be helped,' she said at last. 'I vote we go a bus ride. Let's explore somewhere remote and romantic like The Elephant and Castle or the World's End.'

'There won't be time,' said Judy.

'Oh, blow punctuality!' cried Lydia. 'Who cares if we're late for lunch!'

'Mother will,' said Miranda, but Lydia had danced upstairs.

As the girls came out of the house they met Sir Thomas Chudleigh walking in the opposite direction.

His face, like that of most Londoners, was preoccupied, and like that of most elderly men, it was sad. But as he saw

the three sisters laughing and chattering merrily, he held out his arms and smiled.

'Well!' he cried, 'London was as dull as the Dead Sea, and then I looked up and saw that there were three happy people in it! How do you contrive to be so merry — what is the secret?'

'Oh, nothing in particular,' laughed Lydia, 'only when we're together it's always such fun!'

'We're going for a ride on the top of a bus,' said Judy, 'to the World's End, perhaps — won't you come with us — do!'

'I wish I could,' said Sir Thomas.

He stood for a minute looking after them while all three waved good-bye. And because his life, though comfortable, was lonely, and his constitution, though robust, was elderly, and most of all because he was a bachelor, his smile died away and he sighed.

The three girls boarded a bus that carried a red umbrella over the driver's head and went all the way from Baker Street to Piccadilly for a penny. They sat on the front seats and amused themselves by pointing out the people whom they thought they would resemble when they were middle-aged.

'That's me,' said Miranda, indicating a stout and red-faced woman pushing a perambulator, three children following behind; 'a mother of four, and another loved one at home as like as not.'

'That's me!' said Judy, as a hook-nosed, double-chinned dowager sailed by in a barouche, 'you bet I've got a title, a tiara, and a Place!'

'And that's me!' cried Lydia, looking over the side of the bus where an agitated elderly figure, with her hat on one

side, was scuttling across the road, 'I expect I shall only have a small comic part — a sort of aunt.'

'You're a Cassandra all right!' laughed Miranda. 'It's Aunt Minnie!'

'Why, so it is!' cried Lydia. 'What a sinister omen!'

At another time the suggestion of any resemblance between herself and Aunt Minnie would have annoyed her. For Aunt Minnie, who was in every respect the exact antithesis of her only sister — small and meagre, where Lady Pomfret was solid and ample; timid and propitiatory, where Lady Pomfret was severe and commanding — Aunt Minnie stood for Failure, Silliness and the more extreme and depressing of the Christian virtues, as opposed to Prosperity, Common Sense, and a just and proper regard for the standards of the civilized World. That in some legendary past their aunt had been the victim of a devastating love affair, had behaved in a manner which Lady Pomfret described as Intensely Foolish, and caused all her friends and relations the sharpest anxiety — even this record could not invest Aunt Minnie's personality with pathos or romance. She remained something slightly less than human — an irritating, mosquito-like presence, to be brushed away or dodged.

'What a sinister omen!' cried Lydia.

But she did not care. The day was mild, the sun was shining, Lydia's spirits were high. The night before had made certain what she had strongly suspected already. John Paynton was in earnest. His demand for three vases and two supper extras, his inquiries into the Pomfret family plans for Easter, his proffer of Zoo tickets for Sundays, his desire that Lydia should know his mother better, all denoted one thing. The Pomfret domestic barometer, which had begun to mount the day Mr. Paynton had called, had risen

steadily with every move in the regular and decorous progress of the British upper-middle-class courtship. First there had been his call, in a frock coat, with a top hat, gloyes, and walking stick carried with him into the drawing-room. Then his mother's cards had been left on Lady Pomfret by a footman from a landau and pair; then the invitation to dinner for Sir Caradoc, Lady Pomfret, and Miss Pomfret from Mrs. Paynton at Queen's Gate Gardens; then the first volume of Booth's 'Life and Labour of the People' for Lydia from Mr. Paynton with a little note; after which he had been invited to dine and go to Cousin Agnes's dance. During all these advances no word, no suggestion of love-making, had of course been offered. Such an intrusion would never have been tolerated in the discreet and civilized world in which the Pomfrets moved. The young people who met at dances for the purposes of becoming better acquainted conducted their investigations by means of polite conversations merely. Books might be exchanged, but kisses, never. Only cads and bounders at the cheaper kinds of subscription dances attempted the least familiarity, and only girls with the standards of housemaids permitted them.

The attentions of Mr. Paynton excited in Lydia an agreeable sense of importance. Not only was her vanity flattered by his admiration, but the subconscious impression that she was in some way responsible for the improved spirits that now reigned in Conyngham Place, giving greater license to jokes at meal times and creating a steady flow of chocolates in the schoolroom, touched the ready springs of benevolence in her nature. It was pleasant to feel that she, often so despised and futile, could call forth that kind look of approbation in her mother's eyes; a relief to discover that her carelessness in the matter of the latch-key which had most un-

accountably dropped out of her purse had met with no severer reproof than a sigh and 'What a scatter-brained child it is!'; a source of gratification to know that behind her back Judy and Miranda could join their mother in cosy, confidential little chats, illumined by a secret simmer of excitement.

The Easter holidays separated the family: Lady Pomfret going with her younger daughters to a hotel at Hind Head; Sir Caradoc (who despised Hind Head, which he described as a mixture of Hampstead Heath and South Kensington) taking Lydia with him to stay with the Governor of one of the Channel Islands. Lydia, who enjoyed purely military society only moderately, entreated her sisters to write to her.

I never know who I am when I have been away from you long [she wrote]. The day after I arrived I lost my identity and can't get any one to help me hunt for it. What I want is a brisk and sensible person who will come straight to the point and say, 'Now where did you last have it and what was it like?' Instead of which I have to go on pretending that an invasion of the Islands by Germany may take place at any minute, that Marie Corelli is the greatest of living novelists, and that watching Sports — lots of perspiring men scooting about in bathing drawers — is the most exciting pastime in the world. I don't really get on with soldiers — is it my fault or theirs?

Judy's letter was the first to reach her:

DEAREST LYDIA [she wrote],

You went off with two pairs of my stockings and all my hair curlers: please send them back *at once*. The news is that silly little Chevenix is engaged to Miss Gertrude Gosling — a clear case of pique. However I have had a very nice letter from Daddles and the day before we left Lady Worthington and Ernest came to call. Mother and Lady W. seem to have become very thick all of a sudden. I like Ernest in spite of his spectacles and his tendency to take his future and himself very seriously — I suppose because he likes me. Mother is going to give evening parties every Wednesday in May

and June and we are to give young dinners before them. You are to have one table with your young men and your girl friends and I another. But as I have only one girl friend and seventeen young men perhaps we had better join. Oh, and mother is going to give you the train of her Court dress to be made up, if Rosalie can only be reasonable. And she is to make our summer frocks. And mother thinks you had better have a course of massage for your collar bones when you come back.

Best love and don't forget the hair curlers.

JUDY

The next letter was from Miranda:

DEAREST LYDIA,

It is after lunch, but two cutlets, two castle puddings, and a marshmallow shall not stand between me and my duty to you. Well do I know what it is to be in the wrong house party. Only believe me, if there had been anybody there for whom you felt some affection (my delicate way of saying, 'if there'd been a jolly who was gone on you') you would have found poets in pants, books in the running Blues, sonnets in subalterns, and Love in everything. Yes, I agree that men are uncivilized, but you must remember that they are the bread-winners, and there is a rough pathos about them which you will notice when you are older. Yesterday we went to the Ffoliotts and found a tea-party person — doose take me, I've forgotten her name — in gray with a cinder in her eye, a Mr. Boyle whose wife had unexpectedly sprained her ankle and whose sister fell down some marble steps while shopping with her little dog, and limps to this day. Also Mrs. Foster, who knows the Fish and suddenly said to me in a piercing voice, 'Are you the Miss Pomfret whom Daniel shows his plays to?' And there was mother eating a cress sandwich at my elbow! Mr. Chevenix has written to say that he hopes to bring 'his wife' to call after Whitsuntide . . . Judy is lying down now. I wonder when you are coming back and if we shall meet with effusion or cold restraint. One thing I beg of you. Don't give me a full description of more than five places you have visited. Tell me about the Crystal Grotto, the Norman Tower, the Suspension Bridge, and the queer little town where you came across a bit of genuine thirteenth century Flemish brocade; and endeavour to imitate for my benefit

the quaint patois they speak in one village in Guernsey. But that must be all. Not a word of that day when you started at 6 A.M. and went all round the island in a jaunting car driven by a Jersey veteran, nor of that other foolhardy expedition in a steamer to see the 'Old Woman of Alderney' as they call that curiously formed rock just off the north-east coast. Try and cure yourself of the habit of speaking broken French at meals and taking off your hat whenever the band plays. If a soldier salutes you, don't salute back: it will be a mistake and probably he thought you were the Duchess of Albany. Don't look round expectantly for bouquets and bunting when you arrive at Charing Cross. If you do see them be sure that it is a delusion born of too much seasick medicine. Finally remember that in London nobody knows you, if they did know you they wouldn't care, if they did care it wouldn't matter. Best love,

MIRANDA

P.S. Mr. Paynton has sent you another book. It looks like the second volume of 'Life and Labour of the People,' but I have forbore to send it on to you, noting that the first Vol. is still uncut.

CHAPTER IV REALIZATION

MR. PAYNTON proposed to Lydia in the Zoölogical Gardens. Standing outside the cage containing wolves, jackals, and hyenas, where, after carefully losing her father and sisters, he had conducted Lydia, John Paynton had remained enveloped in a profound silence. Together they stared at the cage, whose inhabitants stared back with the hostile and contemptuous glances of wild animals deprived of their liberty. Lydia, who found the silence of her companion oppressive, and had endeavoured to propitiate Dingo, the wild dog from Australia, with the offer of a peanut, which was rejected, repeated her last remark.

'Don't you think it would?' she said.

'Would what?' said John Paynton.

'Make them more cheerful,' answered Lydia: 'William James in his "Principles of Psychology" says that it is crying that makes you sad and laughter that makes you happy — so that if we could just wag their tails for them it might possibly set up a cheerful current of ideas.'

John Paynton said nothing. Perhaps he had not read William James. Perhaps he did not think the remark worth an answer. Lydia sighed. She was tired of the wolves, jackals, and hyenas; of the Australian dog, who looked just like any other dog; she was tired of the Zoo; she was tired of her companion.

'Let's go to the parrot house!' she said brightly.

'No,' said John Paynton, 'not yet.' Still staring at the

animals in the cage before him he began to speak in a strange, small, suffocated voice.

'Miss Pomfret,' he said, 'Lydia, I love you. From the first moment I saw you I made up my mind ——'

'Gracious!' thought Lydia, in dismay, 'he's proposing!'

That was the worst of proposals. In anticipation so desirable, their actual performance was always unpleasant. This particular occasion was marred for Lydia at the very outset by the extreme inappropriateness of its staging. A proposal, she had always maintained, should be a delicate achievement, conducted under the light of the moon, or the becomingly shaded lamps of a secluded drawing-room, to the sound of music and the fragrance of flowers. But here, in the garish daylight, before an involuntary audience of unsympathetic animals, to the accompaniment of Zoölogical odours and a confused uproar from which the hoarse bark of the sea-lion scenting dinner and the shrill whine of a small boy at the adjoining cage, 'Let *me* give it 'im, muvver, let *me!*' emerged with triumph — could anything, Lydia wondered, be less poetic?

'I'm sorry,' she murmured, 'I'm dreadfully sorry!'

Mr. Paynton did not appear to hear her. His declaration, now well under weigh, followed its predestined course. But the muffled tones of his voice, the medley of sound, and the oppression of Lydia's spirits made it difficult for her to hear what he said. She longed to escape. But the dismal conviction that she must shortly say something not only extremely unsympathetic but positively ungrateful pinned her to the ground.

'I can't!' she cried in distress. 'I'm most dreadfully sorry but I really can't.'

To her extreme relief her father and sisters suddenly appeared.

'We've been looking at the antediluvian anteater!' cried Judy. 'You never saw such a muddle: a cold-blooded mammal with elementary feathers that lays eggs and suckles its young — one of Nature's worst howlers!'

Something in Lydia's expression made Miranda murmur to her father: 'I expect it's time we were going.'

Sir Caradoc turned to Mr. Paynton.

'You'll come back with us, Paynton, to lunch?' he said. 'My wife, I know, is expecting you.'

'Sorry,' said Mr. Paynton a little stiffly, 'I'm afraid my mother has some guests whom she wishes me to meet. This would be your nearest gate if you really must go: shall I call you a cab?'

'Well?' said Judy, cautiously, as she and Lydia jogged home in a hansom, 'did he propose?'

'Yes,' said Lydia rather sulkily, 'and I refused him.'

That afternoon, when the last caller had gone, the tea things had been removed, and the girls were preparing to go to the schoolroom, Lady Pomfret, at her writing table, turned to Lydia.

'One moment, child,' she said, 'before you go. I want to get these invitations settled for next week. Now at your table I thought you would like Agnes Camper, Muriel Brougham, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Paynton, and Sir Deighton Stuart —'

Lydia's heart began to beat.

'Oh bother!' she thought, 'I shall have to tell her!'

'I don't know that we can very well have Mr. Paynton again,' she began a little sheepishly. 'You see, he proposed to me this morning and I — I refused him —'

Lady Pomfret put down her pen and wheeled round in her chair. Surprise, triumph, affection, and consternation struggled for the mastery of her countenance.

'You refused him!' she exclaimed.

'Yes,' said Lydia uncomfortably.

Lady Pomfret took up the invitation cards and put them together in a neat pack. Her expression remained kind and proud, but became increasingly serious.

'Well,' she observed, taking Lydia's hand: 'I hope you have reflected well on what you have done. I need scarcely tell you that both your father and I have the highest possible opinion of Mr. Paynton — an upright, honourable, high-minded young man — pure gold all through! There is hardly any one I should have welcomed more warmly for a son-in-law!'

Lydia said nothing.

Her mother looked at her searchingly.

'I quite thought this time,' she said, 'that your fancy had been taken. What is it exactly that you don't like about him?'

'Well,' said Lydia hesitatingly, 'isn't he rather dull?'

'Dull!' Lady Pomfret repeated the word as though it were one with which she were unfamiliar: 'what do you mean by dull?'

'I mean,' said Lydia uncertainly, 'that he doesn't seem to me very clever.'

'I don't know what you may mean by clever!' said Lady Pomfret with some asperity, 'but I can assure you that Mr. Paynton has abilities of a very high order. He would hardly have achieved the position he now occupies — a position, mind you, of great dignity and responsibility — without remarkable ability. He did well at Oxford — taking an

excellent Second in History; and I'm told — though as you know I know nothing of such things — that he was a very considerable cricketer. But beyond all that,' she continued, as Lydia made no comment, 'beyond all that, there is the question of Character. I need hardly point out to you that Mr. Paynton is a man of exceptionally high character. His mother has told me what an admirable son he has been to her — stepping unselfishly, as a mere lad, into his father's place, and remaining her mainstay ever since. Nor is he one of your worldly self-seekers, having always before him a high ideal of public service. If he gets into Parliament, which is more than likely, he will undoubtedly have a brilliant career —' Lady Pomfret paused. 'A fine-looking young man, too,' she observed. Lydia considered Mr. Paynton's looks. Tall, broad-shouldered, fresh-complexioned, with a red moustache and a high round brow on which neither thought nor care had left the faintest inscription, Mr. Paynton presented a blameless front to the world. Lydia assented. She did not add her private impression, which was that Mr. Paynton's features looked as though they were cut out of cardboard.

'It's only,' she said nervously, 'that I'm not in love with him!'

Lady Pomfret gave Lydia's hand a little squeeze.

'That doesn't matter!' she said kindly. 'Love will come. No one could have been less in love with your father than I was when he proposed to me; but after we had been engaged a month I fell very much in love with him. If you respect a man and can look up to and admire him, the rather foolish feeling you girls call falling in love doesn't matter. It comes, as a rule, after marriage.'

'Oh, but I'm quite sure I could never be in love with

Mr. Paynton!' said Lydia eagerly, 'I never think of him when I hear music; I can't associate him with poetry or anything really beautiful.'

Lady Pomfret gave Lydia's hand a little pat.

'Fiddle!' she exclaimed with a smile, 'that's nothing to do with it. However,' she continued, speaking more seriously, 'although I have, of course, no wish to influence you one way or the other, I hope, my child, that you realize exactly what it is you are throwing away. The devotion of a man like Mr. Paynton may not come your way again, and although you are still very immature in character, you are after all —'

The entry of Noble with the lamps interrupted Lady Pomfret and allowed Lydia to make her escape.

The family delicacy which shrouded all serious subjects with mystery precluded Lydia from discussing Mr. Paynton with her sisters. She had only her own mind to guide her. This organ now registered two distinct impressions: one, that she definitely did not want to marry Mr. Paynton; the other, that she regretted having refused him.

As the days went on it became increasingly clear to her that Mr. Paynton's precipitate proposal had spoiled her season. Here they were — only at the end of May, with all the festivities which had previously bloomed before her nipped in the bud. The second young dinner party had dwindled to a mere handful composed of Judy's admirers; the third threatened to peter out altogether. Madame Rosalie's estimate for making up the court train into a dress for Lydia was pronounced preposterous; the massage of Lydia's collar bones had ceased. Tickets for a charity ball, got up by a fashionable hostess, to which the three girls had been going with a large party, were found, after all, to be

too expensive for the purchase of more than two. It had been Miranda and Judy's turn to go to the Foreign Office party and to the Collier-Gatesons' dance — always a good one — in Portman Square. It was Miranda and Judy's turn to go to Oxford for Eights Week. It would be their turn, Lydia now reflected, to go to Commem.

On a dull afternoon when the others were away at a tea-party Lydia was seized with a sudden inspiration. Sitting down at her desk she wrote in her neat upright handwriting:

DEAR MR. PAYNTON,

I feel perhaps that I may have been too hasty in what I said to you the other day. After all I know you so little. Could we not go on being friends as before?

Yours sincerely

LYDIA POMFRET

'There!' she thought, 'that commits me to nothing. After all, I do know him very little.'

The effect of Lydia's note was to bring John Paynton to the house the very next afternoon. His advent was a surprise to Lady Pomfret and an embarrassment to Lydia, but after the call a distinct rise in the household barometer was clearly noticeable. The following Sunday he called again; and the next morning Lady Pomfret called Lydia to her bedroom and told her, with an affectionate smile, that after all the extortionate Rosalie had climbed down considerably in her estimate, and that Lydia could go to a fitting that very afternoon. The party for the charity ball had now expanded sufficiently to include Lydia and a couple of extra dancing men, one of whom was John Paynton; rooms were found at Oxford for all three girls for Commemoration week. The season resumed its swing.

Lydia would have felt as light-hearted as she had been

before the proposal, if an indefinable uneasiness had not lurked in the unsearched corners of her consciousness. All this, she occasionally remembered, was mere postponement. Sooner or later she would be faced with the horrible prospect of another decision, and this time it would be worse.

'Well?' — the thought sometimes slipped into her head — 'suppose I did marry him? It would please everybody.'

But the notion was one from which Lydia's volatile mind instinctively recoiled. Meanwhile, as long as Mr. Paynton was content to remain in the flattering position of a permanent admirer she could put up with him perfectly well.

One Sunday afternoon in the beginning of July, Mr. Paynton paid a call. Walter Dadbury and little Bobby Grant were also present, and as the afternoon was fine and hot Lady Pomfret did not refuse to allow the three young men to escort the girls to the Park.

Lydia found herself walking with Mr. Paynton, and as they reached the Achilles statue he proposed again. Striding along beside her, speaking in earnest tones, he told her of the pain her refusal had caused him, of the blow it had been to his mother, and of his irresistible conviction that he could make her happy.

'If only,' he implored her, 'you would let your heart speak!'

'My heart!' thought Lydia in dismay, 'but I haven't got a heart!'

Walking at a pace that left her breathless, Mr. Paynton reminded her how wonderfully their tastes and natures agreed.

'I know that you care for the public good as much as I do,' he told her earnestly. 'We could lead useful as well as happy lives working together for our common political ideal!'

'Oh dear!' thought Lydia, her heart sinking, 'how could he have been so easily taken in!'

'Questions of such importance,' continued Mr. Paynton, 'as the housing of the working-classes: you have often agreed with me, haven't you, that the foundation of working-class welfare — not to speak of morality — lies here —'

'Have I?' murmured Lydia, 'I mean of course I have — I mean of course it does —'

'Well, then,' urged Mr. Paynton, 'since we really believe in the same things and can work for the same ends, doesn't it seem to you as if we could make a fine thing out of life together, you and I? I appealed to your heart just now,' he continued, his voice becoming more assured, 'but may I not also appeal to your ambition, to your love of good, to your desire to serve the public?'

'But I haven't any ambition!' thought Lydia miserably, 'and I don't care two straws about the public!'

They had left the others far behind them. Walking with great rapidity, Mr. Paynton unfolded the political career which, with Lydia beside him, he might hope to achieve. At the entrance to Kensington Gardens his membership was certain, at the round Pond they were sitting together on a dozen committees, and by the time they had reached Albert Gate she was already the wife of a cabinet minister.

Lydia was by nature pliant and amiable. Whatever people wished to think her, that she endeavoured to appear. Responding readily to the moods of those around her and adapting her conversation to theirs, she rarely attempted to maintain her own point of view in the face of persistent disagreement. Mr. Paynton was persistent. The day was hot and Lydia was tired. Her shoes pinched her feet. Mr. Paynton walked on. He told her again of the pain her re-

fusal had been to him; again he told her how deeply he cared. For the third time he implored her to yield to her heart.

'Oh, what shall I do?' murmured Lydia, beginning to sob.

'Marry me!' cried Mr. Paynton. 'You will never regret it!'

A tear trickled into Lydia's mouth.

'Oh, very well,' she faltered, 'I suppose I shall have to.'

He had talked and walked her down.

With presence of mind John Paynton immediately hailed a hansom.

'You will let me speak to your father this evening,' he said.

After dinner Mr. Paynton was closeted with Sir Caradoc in the study, and Lydia, saying that she had a headache, slipped upstairs to bed.

The next morning she was wakèned by Marthe who put a letter on the table beside her. It was in John Paynton's handwriting.

'I can't read it now,' said Lydia, and tried to go to sleep again. But the thought that she was engaged lay like a load on her chest. After breakfast she sat down to read a book, but John Paynton's red moustache and smooth forehead came between her and the pages.

'He says he's coming to tea to-morrow,' she thought, 'and that I'm to call him John, and that he's told his mother. And I don't want to see him. Suppose I went out? No: he'd only stay on till I came back.'

Miserably she went out for a walk; but the tall, striding form of John Paynton seemed to haunt every street. Indoors he was everywhere: every room, every book, every chair seemed full of him.

After lunch Lady Pomfret took her into the drawing-

room, kissed her affectionately, and said: 'My own dear child, I feel sure you have decided wisely and know that you will be very happy.'

The glad kind look in her mother's eyes made Lydia feel wretched. At dinner she sat in a subdued silence which contrasted ill with the slightly unnatural gaiety of her mother's table talk.

'I can't get out of it now,' she thought in leaden depression: 'Mother wants it, Father, the girls. The servants, I know, would love a wedding. Mr. Paynton — John, I mean — says his mother is overjoyed. There's only me who isn't. I suppose I've got to live for others.'

It seemed to Lydia that she had no choice. John Stuart Mill, whose works she revered, had written that the principle of the Greatest Happiness of the Greatest Number was the surest guide to social conduct. How could she contravene an authority so august?

She thought of marriage. It meant having a house of her own, she supposed, and plenty of money. Lydia did not care about houses: what could she do with money? 'I could take Judy and Miranda to things and buy them hats,' she thought, extracting what comfort she could from the possibilities of Wealth. What else would there be? She could think of nothing else.

At bedtime Miranda slid her arm round Lydia's waist and whispered, 'What's up?'

'I'm engaged to Mr. Paynton,' said Lydia miserably.
She followed her sister into her bedroom.
'Don't you want to marry him?' asked Miranda.
'No,' said Lydia, 'I hate the thought of it. I feel exactly as if I were going to the dentist.'
'You must break it off, then,' said Miranda, firmly.

Composed and resolute, she sat down on her bed. 'It's ridiculous to think of marrying if you feel like that.'

'But how can I?' asked Lydia, standing on one foot. 'Mother is so pleased, and besides, he says he's bought me a ring.'

'Nonsense,' said Miranda, with quiet decision. 'You must write at once and tell him that you can't do it.'

Lydia's face began faintly to brighten. 'Oh, do you think I really could?' she asked doubtfully.

'Certainly,' said Miranda, 'here, write it at once.'

Lydia sat down at Miranda's writing-table.

'What shall I say?' she asked, nibbling the top of her pen-holder.

'What you like,' replied Miranda dryly, 'so long as you make it clear.'

Lydia wrote three letters and tore up two.

'Will you tell Mother for me?' she asked dolefully. 'I simply can't face it!'

'Very well,' said Miranda.

Lydia addressed her letter, ran downstairs, and slipped it into the letter-box.

Her engagement was at an end.'

CHAPTER V

DEPRESSION

IT was winter. A yellow fog hung over London. At three o'clock in the afternoon Lady Pomfret had been obliged to ring for the lamps. Erect as usual, she sat at her writing-table, adding up columns of figures. Before her was the ever-recurring domestic problem: how to reconcile the need for strict economy with the principle of never having anything but the Best? The Best, of course, was imperative. Nothing else 'did.' Meanwhile here were the weekly books and there — menacing, sinister, not to be disclosed — was the imminent certainty of an overdraft.

Lady Pomfret added up a row. Butcher . . . high. The servants, of course, ate inordinately. Mrs. Bodymead was no manager; heavy-handed with the groceries and actually permitting Old Maria, who came in yesterday, to consume the snipe left over from dinner, which, eaten cold with an orange salad, would have done perfectly for Caradoc's lunch. Most disloyal, as she had told them both. Fishmonger . . . high. But oysters were so nourishing. Dairy . . . higher. Yet bread sauce was nothing made without cream, and how Lord Podbury had enjoyed the mousse! Doubtless he was rather a gourmet, though so High Church and such a good talker, never telling the same story twice — 'Yes: what is it, Caradoc?'

Sir Caradoc had opened the drawing-room door and stood on the threshold, his spectacles over his forehead, an uneasy smile on his face.

'What is it, old man? Do you want the Westminster?'

'I have seen it, thank you,' replied her husband, still standing in the doorway.

Lady Pomfret put down her pen. She wished that the dear good man would either come in or go out. 'I have one of my bad headaches coming on,' she said, 'and must do these wretched accounts ——'

Murmuring something inaudible, Sir Caradoc turned away.

'I'll come in to you on my way upstairs,' his wife called after him as he shut the door.

What was it — indigestion, or something at the Office? A little magnesia, probably . . .

Confectioner . . . rather high . . . Mrs. Bodymead a poor hand at cakes. Her cooking still inclined to be middle-class, though she was teachable and scrupulously clean. But alas, no manager.

Now Management, thought Lady Pomfret, was the gift in which she herself excelled. Hadn't she managed her father's household ever since the age of sixteen? Very strenuous it had been too, even at the Deanery, so sunny and cheerful with all the old staff of servants; and of course, much harder at the Palace, old-fashioned and cumbrous as it was, with those extravagant fire-places burning a ton of coal a week; and so many people to be catered for and the curates perpetually proposing and those enormous Sunday lunches . . .

A dreary day, Sunday. Blinds drawn down; all the books, except 'Pilgrim's Progress,' Fox's 'Book of Martyrs,' and Blair's 'Tomb,' put away. Church three times. And dear Papa becoming increasingly Evangelical and more and more difficult to live with. His mania for small economies! That

evening, coming home late after a party (not a dance: Papa wouldn't hear of dances and, of course, strictly forbade the theatre), to which she had worn her pink tarlatan with a gold locket on black velvet — most becoming; and there was Papa sitting up in the drawing-room with a face white with fury. 'Oh, Papa — why did you sit up!' 'Look at *this!*' And with trembling fingers he had pointed to an envelope on which was written: 'Don't wait up for me: Emma Fanshaw is seeing me home.' 'Well, Papa — Emma has just left me!' 'You should not have used an *envelope*' (in a voice of thunder); 'you should have used a **HALF SHEET!**' . . . Naturally it was necessary to conceal a good many things from Papa; unlike Minnie who blurted everything out (how Minnie had irritated him!). And Papa's second marriage: 'Aunt Georginia' — what a perfect fool! After this it became extremely desirable to leave home. . . . Mr. Chudleigh? Mr. Bloomfield? Mr. Theobald? Mr. Bellamy? . . . Ah, Mr. Bellamy . . . Why, why had not Mr. Bellamy proposed! So good, so handsome, so clever, and certain, Papa said, to become a Bishop. And she would have been so glad, so proud . . . But he had married Sophy Streatham, very stout and heavy, though of course, religious. After which had followed a great deal of strenuous work in the district under the new ideas of Organized Charity; and she had taken up nursing for which she had an undeniable gift. Then Emma Fanshaw said, 'You'd better marry Mr. Pomfret: he's rising and well connected —'

. . . Of course she had not been in love with him. Modest girls did not fall in love. That kind of thing was most unwholesome as well as coarse, and sincerely did she hope that no child of hers would ever lose her head about a man . . . But there had been the babies — such beautiful babies and

all her very, very own. That was what a woman wanted most . . . But alas, all girls! How passionately she had prayed to have a son . . . how slowly, how painfully, that hope had died. . . . And the girls grew up, grew away from her, dressed themselves unsuitably, and were of absolutely no use to their mother. It was their mother who had to do all the thinking for them, all the planning, on whom all the responsibility fell; their mother who had no one to depend on, no one to consult; their mother, who was so ill and might so easily die . . . Die, and go where? What became of one? Who could tell? For of course one had long ago given up believing in the kind of doctrines preached by Papa. . . . Only death was certain. And the courage to meet it must come from herself alone. No hopes, no prayers, no medical skill, nor even friends, many and good and true though they had always been, could help in the end. . . . And what would become of the children and Caradoc if she should die? And how was it possible to 'avoid worry' as the doctors told her she should avoid it, when there was always so much to worry about? — money, Caradoc's retirement, and of course, the future of the girls. . . .

Lady Pomfret shut her account book, wiped her pen carefully, rose, and came over to the fire. Sitting down in a comfortable armchair, she put her feet in the fender. On the mantelpiece opposite her were photographs of her three daughters: intently she looked at each in turn.

First and longest she looked at the face of Judy, taken at eighteen, radiant and smiling in her first evening dress.

Bless the darling child: there was nobody like her! Her father's fine features, her mother's white skin, and all her mother's best qualities. What vitality she had — what pluck! How miraculously she picked up after her illnesses!

Impossible to forget that dreadful winter when Judy had pneumonia and old Spicer had put out his hand so! — and said that it might be this way or that. What a clever doctor old Spicer was. ‘Nursed nine months,’ he had said, ‘and her mother’s constitution — she’ll pull through anything!’ Judy was made of the right stuff: so clever and practical, never mooning, always on the spot. And yet . . . even Judy could be foolish. She wasted her energies. Those fribbling young men, Trotter and Grant — not a penny between them and never would be. Then all this Health Visiting: most excellent and practical no doubt — but look at the way it made her late for lunch, day after day, and after all what did it lead to? How was it that Judy, so brilliant and so much admired, hadn’t made better use of her opportunities? This autumn for instance . . . all her clothes had been most carefully overhauled. . . . A very expensive tweed coat and skirt. And it had seemed so certain! For nothing could have been more frank and friendly than that little talk with Lady Worthington this spring! ‘If it could be one of your dear girls,’ she had said; and Ernest had been obviously much attracted to Judy. And then — what happened? That vile young man had allowed himself to be caught by a woman more than twice his age! Who could believe that the son of such Good people could be so unprincipled! . . . Money, of course: that was the Worthingtons’ weakness. Well, no man could serve God and Mammon . . . and that old cake basket of Martha Pusey’s would be quite good enough for a wedding present.

And Lydia . . . (Lady Pomfret sighed again as her glance fell on the photograph of her eldest daughter, taken looking upwards with a rather provocative expression.) Lydia was two years older than Judy and had always been difficult.

No stamina. No backbone. Giving up her drawing and refusing that excellent, delightful Mr. Paynton. Her mother blamed herself. She should have been firmer. She should not have listened to Caradoc who had objected to any pressure being put upon the child. But what did the dear man know about it? Caradoc was weak.... What Lydia needed was Discipline and a Firm Hand. And of course, bracing air. She had always been unstable, even as a baby. Yet what a beautiful baby she had been — and such a dear merry little girl! And then what a successful débutante! Every one had congratulated her mother on taking out such an attractive daughter.... Not, of course, that Lydia could compare in attractiveness with her mother as a girl. 'She's certainly very pretty,' Tom Chudleigh had said, 'but she'll never be a patch on her mother!'.... Poor Tom. He had never married, of course. Neither had Mr. Theobald. And Mr. Bloomfield had only married very late in life and then it had turned out most unhappily.... No: Lydia was inclined to take after Minnie. The same lack of balance, the same weakness of character. Minnie never could make up her mind about her admirers — shilly-shallying about with first one and then another till she fell a victim to that ill-starred infatuation.... But, of course, as Lydia was her mother's daughter she would never be such a hopeless goose or make such an utter failure of her life as poor Minnie had done. All the same Lydia must have a good talking to; and old Mrs. Box should make her some more flannel petticoats, scalloped like Miranda's night-gowns.

Miranda . . . (Lady Pomfret's gaze passed more briefly over the photograph of her youngest daughter: an unbecoming photograph, making her look matronly and set.) Miranda was a dear, good girl, but a little wooden. She

lacked the vivacity of her sisters; she did not make enough effort to chatter and be agreeable. Then this foolish sentimental attachment to that undesirable Mr. Whiteing, who was always dangling after some young woman or other and who kept better men away. Nothing would come of that! Amy Foster had said most emphatically that Daniel, as she called him, and who was, so she declared, absurdly devoted to herself, would never marry Miranda. The sooner the whole thing was put a stop to the better. Miranda must take up some solid work — home nursing or cookery. . . .

The clock struck the hour. Lady Pomfret rose and pushed back her chair. ‘And now,’ she said, ‘I must go and see what that old gentleman wants.’

Meanwhile Miranda, upstairs in her room, urged on by bad weather, low spirits, and a sense of duty, was engaged in the distasteful task of tidying up. Her cupboard . . . the things that ought to be thrown away and yet, for sentimental reasons, must be kept. That ugly vase, the present of an ancient governess; this kettle-holder, worked by her little cousin Grace. Mother would say — Rubbish! Make a clean sweep of them; but no, they should stay. Her desk . . . The diary in which every day she chronicled the state of the weather: ‘Morning rainy: stayed in. Afternoon fine: went out.’ The little black book in which she occasionally wrote poems. Here was the last:

Not the true martyrs they, who, souls on fire
With burning ardour of self-sacrifice,
Ever behold through rapt, adoring eyes
Some heavenly vision to counsel or inspire.
But rather those, who steadily aspire,
Unhelped by love or hope, daily to rise

To Selfless state. Who sadly recognize
Man's shamefulness, yet strive to lift him higher.
No hope for these of heavenly heritage,
Life's labour done. But only theirs the prayer
That sleep eternal be some day their wage.
Yet more divinity in such despair
Doth lie: And in the record of each page
The glory of self crucified shines clear.

Yes, thought Miranda, as she read the poem again, Stoicism was the noblest creed. And she would have liked to have gone to the British Museum and had another look at the bust of the Roman Emperor whose golden meditations had so inspired her life.

Letters to be sorted. One from the district: 'Honoured Miss, I write to say as how I am truely greatful for the bovril but young Stan still very Queer, he cant keep Nothink down and Cissie had another bad Turn Sunday, and also for the warm Drawers' . . . That could go. A letter from Grace: 'Darling Mandy, I hope you are quite well. Yesterday the parakeets got out. I can bicycle quite nearly properly.' Grace's letters were kept. A letter from Aunt Maud, written from Chandrabad . . . 'Grace's kind and affectionate playmate . . .' Well, she had always been fond of Grace; although this summer, with her unscrupulous use of Miranda's underclothing for her dolls, and her teeth coming out, she had lost a good deal of her charm. 'Perfect trust in your care.' 'If anything should happen to me' — Aunt Maud thought she had something the matter with her heart, but Mother said that was nonsense, she was as strong as a horse . . . 'A mother to my child . . .' Dash it! Did Aunt Maud really suppose that she, Miranda, was going to be saddled with Grace for the rest of her life! What about

Miranda's own children! No doubt Aunt Maud assumed that Miranda would never marry! . . . (And here the letter was rapidly torn into extremely small fragments and hurled with remarkable energy into the fire.) A letter from Lydia. . . . That was the one point about visiting: writing to and getting letters from the girls. This one was written this autumn and addressed Scotland. Miranda read it again.

GLENSTARVIT, FIFE

DEAREST MIRANDA,

I expect you would like to hear our impressions of a country famous for its beautiful scenery, but as this has been practically invisible since our arrival, owing to the thick mists in which it has been enveloped I will describe instead the human features which I fancy may interest you more.

The house party consists of Sir Hartly and Lady Worthington, whom you know, Ernest, their son, and his four Cambridge friends. Besides Judy and myself, there are two girls — a Miss Shellfish — or some name like that — with a flat face and a bad sense of humour, and a cousin of Ernest's called Emily Drake, who makes bead necklaces but is very nice. Emily tells us what we want to know: which is that Lady Worthington, who is most anxious that Ernest should marry a nice girl, has them up in batches on appro, and gives the unsuccessful candidates, when they leave, a gold safety pin as a consolation prize. (Agnes Camper had one last summer and Muriel Brougham one at Christmas.) The Cambridge men are: first, a Mr. Pimm, a scientific genius, who knows all about Atoms; second, Mr. Pratt, a Philosopher, who knows all about Truth; third, Mr. Polkinghorne (pronounced Poon), a Realist poet, who has just brought out a volume of stark and austere verse called 'Phossy-jaw'; and lastly, the hideous Hum. After Judy and I had unpacked and changed our things we came into the drawing-room, expecting to find tea. Instead, we found the room very nearly dark, with two men stretched on the hearth-rug and two strewn on the ground, a silence as of death over the assembly. After we had picked our way over their legs, I asked Emily Drake in a whisper whether they were Quakers and were having a Silent Prayer, but she said No, that this

was the Cambridge way of carrying on a conversation. Presently Mr. Pimm made a remark about Tariff Reform and Mr. Polkinghorne said 'Quite'; and after a long pause, Mr. Pratt said, 'Not very.'

It seems that they are all extremely sincere and simple; that they never say anything unless they really mean it and believe it is to be perfectly true, and that they never do anything which they consider conventional and superfluous, such as saying 'Thank you' when the butter is passed, washing their hands, or brushing their hair. Also that they believe in the equality of the sexes, and never degrade women by talking to them, opening doors for them, or offering them chairs.

Presently in came another woman, a Miss Scrymgeour, who is about forty, with iron-grey hair (cut short), spectacles, a grey Jaeger blouse, and laced-up boots which she wears in the house. Miss Scrymgeour began talking at once in a very loud voice about the Minority Report and continued talking till it was time to dress for dinner. That is to say, Judy and I and the two girls dressed, but Miss Scrymgeour and the men went on talking and came in to dinner just as they were in their scrubby clothes and black finger nails. After dinner all the men and Miss Scrymgeour sat in one part of the drawing room and we girls sat in another. Presently I saw Lady Worthington give Ernest a poke: he walked over to where we were sitting, looked very uncomfortable for several seconds and then in a 'dismal voice said 'Hullo!' Miss Shellfish said 'Hullo!' back with a nervous titter, after which he walked away. I couldn't help hearing Lady Worthington ask Mr. Polkinghorne if he didn't think Judy very pretty, and he said that she might be called good-looking in a conventional way but that she lacked the indefinable charm of a woman who has worked for her living.

That night it turned very cold, but there were no fires anywhere and I had only one blanket on my bed. After I had put on all my clothes and still shivered, I had to take up the carpet and sleep under that. Even Judy who makes a point of never noticing the weather came down with rather a pink nose next morning. Breakfast was at nine o'clock and the men raced each other which should be down last. But at eleven-thirty, when Mr. Pratt was just beginning his, Lady Worthington came in with a very small basket of sandwiches and told us that we were all to go out and picnic on the hills. It was

raining steadily, but she didn't seem to notice that. We went out in mackintoshes and umbrellas, all the men and Miss Scrymgeour striding on ahead, the two girls, Judy, and I pattering weakly behind. I asked Emily Drake if we wouldn't turn back, but she said on no account; Lady Worthington always made her guests go out for picnics while she and Sir James lunched on sardines. It seems that though wealthy she is also very economical. After we had been walking for some hours we stopped by some boulders and ate the sandwiches. It was raining hard, the sandwiches were soaking, and there were not nearly enough. Ernest said we were to walk on another seven miles till we came to an inn where we should be joined by another Cambridge man and his wife and have tea. I was so tired that I got left behind and Ernest sent Mr. Pratt to look for me. I thought it would be rude not to try and talk, so I asked him whether he admired the poems of Tennyson. He said 'No.' I said, not the later ones of course, but that I didn't see how any one could help liking the early ones. He said 'Oh.' Then I asked him whether he didn't think 'Ulysses' very beautiful? He said 'Not very.' I thought I would ask him which he liked best, Shakespeare or Marie Corelli, cats or dogs, billiards or chrysanthemums, and chose the last. He said 'Neither.' After this we walked on in silence. At the inn we were joined by the other man and his wife, who wore a hard black sailor-hat and took no notice of anybody. The inn was so full and there were so few chairs that Judy had to sit on my lap. The other man got a chair for himself, and when his wife stood about looking for somewhere to sit, he pointed to the floor and she sat down on that. After tea Ernest fumbled in his pockets, but found that he had only sixpence, and so as no one else even fumbled, Judy paid for the tea. It came to eleven shillings. As it was raining harder than ever Ernest said we had better drive back, so all the men and Miss Scrymgeour got into a wagonette and we girls into a dog-cart.

After dinner I asked the hideous Hum, who is too much afraid of Mr. Pratt and Mr. Polkinghorne to talk to me when they are there, though he can be pleasant enough behind their backs, what he thought of Miss Scrymgeour. He said he thought she was very Real. It seems that this is a quality rare in young ladies, most of whom wear clothes that are uselessly ornamental — e.g. the coffee-coats into which Judy and I changed for tea — and whose main desire in

life is to please. I must admit that I am not particularly real, but I think Judy is at least as real as Miss Shellfish because she does know about slums. When we said Good-bye Lady Worthington kissed Judy, but not me, and pressed a small cardboard box into Miss Shellfish's hand. But don't tell Mother as she might build on it.

Much love,

LYDIA

P.S. Judy had a look at the safety-pin brooch and she says she is certain it isn't real gold.

A bad job, thought Miranda, Ernest Worthington getting engaged to Miss Scrymgeour! Mother had been dreadfully depressed. Luckily Judy didn't care, and Ernest was certainly rather a bore. But poor Mother! Oh, why couldn't either of the girls get engaged — it would so please Mother! Even a proposal would set her up! . . . Though of course it was dishonest of Lydia to encourage people when she didn't mean it and she had behaved very badly to Mr. Paynton . . . Since then everything had gone wrong. And now, not a Beau in sight! The Grenadier Guards were abroad. Daddles was in a nursing home for an operation for appendicitis. Sir Deighton Stuart had refused two invitations to dinner and had failed to make an explanatory call. The only people who came on Sunday were Paul Trotter and Bobby Grant — those 'little wastrels,' as Mother called them. What good were they?

Poor Mother . . . She was feeling dreadfully worried about her health . . . The possibility of an operation: could she stand it? And Money was evidently a trouble, because yesterday in the Park Mother had begun to talk very solemnly about 'your father's retirement'; and how when that happened it would be impossible to go on living in Conyngham Place. And then still more solemnly about 'if anything

should happen to your father' — and she had refused to be diverted by the sight of Mrs. Umphleby, sound asleep in her landau with her bonnet on one side and her mouth wide open. 'You girls,' Mother said, 'would have to turn to and earn your livings.' Careers, which in happier moments were tossed aside like worn-out clothes, were now drawn forth from their hiding-places and held out grimly for inspection. 'I have no fears for Judy,' Mother said. 'With her character and capacities she could do anything, fill any position; but I shudder to think of the hopeless mess my poor Lydia would make of her life if she were left to fend for herself, and as for you ——'

It would be governessing for her, Miranda reflected, if the Fish didn't come up to the scratch. Governessing or that bleak avocation produced by Mother as though by inspiration — teaching the Deaf and Dumb. 'I am told,' she had said, 'they work wonders; and no doubt if you gave your mind to it you could acquire the knack.'

... The prospect lacked glamour. Ah why had the Fish not been to call! Only one skimpy letter, signed 'Yours sincerely,' and his supper extra cut short at the Collier-Gatesons' dance. How many more years would she be kept waiting — and what a life of waiting a girl's was! Waiting, wondering, hoping, saying nothing, hiding her feelings, keeping everything in . . . Some women waited all their youth and never married in the end. A bad business, being a woman. No wonder mothers wanted sons.

Sighing deeply, Miranda shut her desk, and went downstairs. The winter had begun very badly; would things get better in the spring?

But as fogs changed to frost and the first fall of snow

whitened the chimney pots of Conyngham Place, the winter, which had begun so badly, grew worse. January filled the house with bills and heavy colds. February laid prostrate first Sir Caradoc, then the cook, and finally Lady Pomfret with influenza. Doctors were called into consultation, nurses summoned. Sir Caradoc, deprived of the resources of the Office, the Athenaeum, and the support of his wife, sank into melancholy. The girls tiptoed about the house feeling guilty, as well people do when others are ill; feeling helpless, as young people must when their elders are laid low. As Miranda stood by her mother's bedside trying desperately to catch the endless flow of messages that issued from the invalid's exhausted lips, she would think, 'What good are we! There is Mother so terribly ill and we can do nothing to help!'

The great Sir David arrived; sounded both parents, spoke gravely of the after-effects of influenza and observed, 'I must urge you, dear Lady Pomfret, not to delay. Six weeks of Riviera sunshine would make all the difference to Sir Caradoc, and is absolutely essential for yourself —'

They went.

The girls looked at each other with suppressed excitement. For six weeks they would be grass-orphans — that enviable state! What did it matter now about making a noise! William might slide down the banisters, cooking smells soar to the attics, the door at the top of the stairs stand open all day while the basement rang with cries. The girls went to bed at midnight, rose late, followed bus routes to their wild mountain sources, and had tea at remote and rural A.B.C.'s. Miranda neglected the stationary cases, Lydia the flowers; the heavy drawing-room shook with laughter as they sat up inventing paper games. They made

Sir Thomas Chudleigh go with them to the Tower of London and spent an entralling afternoon watching that new wonder, the Cinematograph.

But the climax was reached when one afternoon Judy came back from Bermondsey blushing and smiling. 'Guess whom I've met?' she cried. 'Peter Goring! He's home on sick leave and has asked me to go to the Guards Club for tea. He says he wants to know something about the hidden side of London life and I'm going to take him to see the worst slums in Bermondsey. What about asking him to dinner?'

In answer to Judy's letter of inquiry whether Peter Goring's name might be added to the list of select and eligible young gentlemen who could be invited to the house in the absence of its hostess, Lady Pomfret sent a postcard:

Delighted. Ask W. Dadbury, Sir D. Stuart, and Sir Thomas. Order a brace of guinea fowl from McWhirter, make Miranda look out a couple of bottles of Haut Brion and the 1860 Port. Your father much better but has caught a fresh cold and is very sorry for himself. I am slowly, very slowly, struggling back to life. We shall be home on the 5th.

Peter Goring accepted the invitation to dinner, went with Judy to Bermondsey, and called two mornings afterwards to take her to a sale at Tattersall's. He appeared to have infinite leisure — far more leisure than Judy, who was pledged to two committees and had fifty-three case cards to fill in before the next day. He took her all the way to Bermondsey in a hansom, then to lunch at Prince's, and spent the rest of the afternoon filling in the case cards in an interesting and illegible hand.

Wind of Peter Goring's sudden enthusiasm for the medical welfare of the masses brought Lady Pomfret and Sir Caradoc back in excellent health and spirits. The Easter

holidays (Hind Head again) passed like a flash: May saw the drawing-room bright with new cretonnes and the writing-table laden with a pile of beautifully written invitation-cards. And when May departed leaving a morning of June sunshine and June skies, Judy, dressed in a charming blue linen frock and a blue hat, a black and white tulle ruff framing her round white neck, announced casually that she was going to inspect home-workers at Hoxton and might not be back till dinner.

'Where are you going?' whispered Lydia eagerly. 'I promise not to tell! At the Paradynes yesterday Emily Drake asked most tenderly after you, but rather than say a word about Peter I bit my tongue till the blood ran!'

'Let's see your tongue,' said Judy suspiciously.

'You can trust me,' said Miranda. 'My silence is notorious. Is it Gretna Green?'

'Almost,' said Judy. 'We're going to Harsh, the home of his childhood and youth. Lord Rendall's away.'

As Judy took up her gloves and fluffy parasol and picked up the tail of her skirt, Miranda and Lydia looked at each other.

'I'll bet you a pound of peppermint creams to a packet of invisible hair pins,' said Miranda, when the door had shut behind her sister, 'he'll do it to-day.'

CHAPTER VI

JUDY'S WEDDING

'A KRONOS clock from Sir George and Lady Beaton-Belvoir,' read out Lydia, 'a silver sugar sifter — that's the fourth — from Mrs. Umphleby; a Crown Derby coffee set from Mr. Gibson. I can do those. A pair of China dogs, in execrable taste (probably priceless), from Lady Pounder — you can take them back to Goode's. One small plated toast-rack — dash it, that *is* mean, when you could have had them up for breach of promise — from Sir Hartly and Lady Worthington. Two antique silver candlesticks — no, I wrong him, four, from the Archbishop. I'm afraid, darling, you'll have to do these yourself. Oh, Noble,' she broke off in dismay, as the parlour-maid entered with a tray, 'don't say you've got any more!'

'Three more, Miss,' said Noble, depositing her load.

'That brings the total up to four hundred and sixty-three,' said Judy wearily; 'thank God it's the last post to-night.'

'Here you are,' said Lydia, undoing the packages, 'another coffee set from Sir Deighton Stuart. Oh, hurrah! Here's the duck-crusher back again with her very best love from the dow. Lady Foljambe! She's had it polished up, I see — yes, it's the same old thing; I remember the dent on the handle. I told mother when she sent it to Mary Fleming that we should see it again at the very next wedding. Little did I think it would be our own!'

The duck-crusher, like the wine-cooler, was one of the rotating wedding presents. Ugly, useless, and expensive,

its destiny was to be passed on as rapidly as possible, like the Queen in the game of Old Maid, from bride to bride.

'Only one more, darling, and I can manage that — two toilet mats from Old Maria. Now I'll get on with the others.

"How can I thank you enough," murmured Lydia, writing in a hand which she endeavoured to model on her sister's, "for your beautiful and much valued wedding present! It is exactly what I most want, and whenever I use it" — no, dash it! one can't say "use" of a China dog — "whenever I look at it, I shall be reminded of you!"'

'Don't say that,' corrected Judy, 'or she may think it a reflection on her own features. Here, you might do Madame Krasinoff's pendant for me — foreigners never see any difference in English hands.'

Judy bent over her writing-table. Her engagement was fulfilling its traditional object of wearing down the bride, who, overworked and becoming daily thinner, was in no condition to oppose her will to that of husband, parents, or parents-in-law. In the present instance the discipline was superfluous. Judy, who had maintained a decorous command of her feelings till the proposal was over, was now much in love; whilst Lady Pomfret had confided to Miranda on returning from the Riviera that she thought the possibility of acquiring Peter Goring as a son-in-law almost too good to be believed. Perfect harmony reigned in Conyngham Place. It is true that the prospect of an alliance with any member of Lord Rendall's family might have daunted less resolute spirits. 'Rummy sort of brother-in-law you've got,' remarked Lord Podbury genially to Sir Caradoc at the Athenæum. But Lady Pomfret, who had been at school with the deceased Lady Rendall — 'poor dear Kate' — and who remembered Thomas Goring, Lord Rendall's first

cousin, as one of her earliest admirers, recognized in the adamantine Baron a character that she could respect. As for Peter himself, Lady Pomfret's affection was bestowed more on what he promised for her daughter than on what he actually presented to herself. Peter Goring possessed neither the smooth brow, the candid eye, nor the flow of amiable and ingenuous conversation with which a young man most easily engages the affection of middle-aged ladies. Although following the career of arms, neither in character nor appearance did he conform to the strictly military type. When addressed, his face would suddenly light up; but instantly afterwards his smile would be bitten off at the ends, and an iron would seem to have been passed rapidly over his face, obliterating from it every trace of expression.

Judy's impression of her father-in-law and future home were inscribed in a letter to her sisters:

DEAREST GIRLS,

I have just sneaked upstairs while my fringe is curling before lunch to write to you.

You will be pleased to hear that Harsh is all that an historic place ought to be — a haunted room, tapestried walls, armoured knights in the gallery, a secret passage (discovered by Peter), and armies of rats and black beetles in the basement. There is no bathroom and the sanitary arrangements are *most* peculiar. . . . Lovely old pictures in the gallery: one very interesting portrait of Boniface Goring, the explorer, in a ruff with a pick-axe in his hand — the lower part of his face exactly like Peter; and another of the beautiful Hungarian, Kopsacszi Gizi (Christian name last), who Lord Rendall's father ran away with; she is *exactly* like Peter — the top part of her face.

Lord Rendall is *very* alarming. He looks like the old Earl in 'Little Lord Fauntleroy,' and has a most powerful vocabulary. This morning the coffee machine boiled over in the middle of prayers. Lord Rendall said 'Our Father which art in — look at the coffee! Jephson

— art in — dammit, Jephson, why don't you blow the damned thing out! — Hallowed be thy name —' etc. Still he calls me Judith, and kisses me very civilly on the brow. Conversation at dinner was rather difficult because there were so many subjects that might not be discussed. Politics were strictly prohibited because Lord Rendall is a black Tory and would break off the engagement if he knew that father was a pro-Boer. Society is just as difficult because whenever I mention any one we know Peter kicks me violently on the ankles, meaning that there has been a quarrel. The only person I may safely mention is the Duchess of Sark, who is Lord Rendall's tenant for life at the Dower House, which she has for about sixpence a year.

Peter is *so* pathetic! Poor lamb — he has had a most unhappy childhood. When he was nine he ran away. He used to walk at night, and sleep in the trees by day and got as far as Yorkshire. There he fell out of an ash on to the top of a keeper, broke his arm, and was sent home. When he was thirteen he ran away again and hid under some nets in a fishing smack, getting as far as the coast of France. But a brute of a Custom House Officer declared that he was contraband and had him arrested and sent home. Peter won't tell me what happened when he got back to Harsh. He wanted dreadfully to be a sailor but Lord Rendall said that the eldest son of an old crusading family always went into the army. Peter hates being a soldier: he can't stand mess-room jokes or his fellow officers or doing nothing and pretending it is something. He says he would have liked to be his ancestor Boniface Goring, the explorer, who went out with John Smith and died defending Jamestown from the Indians. Peter admires Smith more than any character in history, and says that he has no use for modern civilization, and would have liked to have lived in the sixteenth century. Peter is really *remarkably* gifted. He can play any tune by ear on any instrument, make all sorts of ingenious things with his hands, ride any horse backwards, and tame any animal. He carries a lizard about in his sponge bag and has a tame bear called Lucy who follows him about like a dog and gives the housemaids the most terrible frights. Lucy is not very popular in barracks and when the Colonel, who is *most* conventional, asked Peter what he wanted a bear for, Peter said 'For company.' I had to break it to Peter that I wasn't particularly fond of dumb things, which grieved him, as he said that the bear was the only creature for whom he had felt any sympathy till he had met me.

I haven't yet seen either of Peter's brothers. Simon, the second, was, Peter tells me, always very delicate and could never go in a train or a carriage without being sick. He is extremely religious and wanted dreadfully to be a clergyman. But Lord Rendall said that the tradition in his family was for the second son to join the Navy, so poor Simon had to go to sea. The third son, Andrew, has, so Peter tells me, a genius for mathematics, and could have been senior wrangler easily. But Lord Rendall said that the third son was always a diplomat or a clergyman and that Andrew could take his choice. But as Andrew is a conscientious atheist — so unlike darling Peter, who believes in witchcraft and a personal Devil — and has no ear for languages, he took the bit between his teeth and went into the Stock Exchange.

Peter says I am to do my hair low and brush back my fringe — do you think I shall look awful? And that my black voile isn't really right, but my blue muslin is perfect, and — oh dash! the gong! I must fly. Best love.

JUDY

To his future sisters-in-law Peter appeared a fascinating figure. He taught Lydia to ride bareback and encouraged Miranda to swear. 'You should let yourselves go more!' he told the girls when they warned him that their mother would object to his plan that they should all four spend a night in the woods. Galloping recklessly, with his hair flying back from his classic profile, he looked to Lydia like the 'sudden Diomede' of 'Troylus and Cryseyde'; or lying cross-legged on his back beneath a tree playing the flageolet, while Judy (who was not musical) rumpled his hair, he showed in his attitude of happy abandonment the grace of a semi-domesticated Pan. When alone with the girls his expression would relax and a sudden vivid smile would transform his face. He told them long stories of improbable adventures — of shipwrecks and sea-serpents, bandits and crocodiles; of a sailor he had known who had been moon-

struck and of gipsies who could make love potions and cast spells. He told them how he had brought home a young eagle from the Carpathians to keep down the rabbits at Harsh, and had given a mongoose to the cook to catch mice. 'Why not a dog and a cat?' asked Judy. But Peter explained that he thought dogs rather commonplace and that his father would not allow a cat on the estate.

The Gorings, a scattered and not very harmonious clan, agreed sufficiently to come to the wedding. 'The great question is,' said Lady Pomfret, knitting her brows, 'how to get them all in. It's all very well for Lord Rendall to say he has kept his lists small, but this house, even with the doors out, can't possibly hold more than five hundred at a given minute, and we ought to ask eight.' Even when the expedient of relegating the outer circle of acquaintances to a wedding present tea-party a few days before had somewhat lessened the strain, Lydia was filled with fears lest some person, standing in the category of 'pathetic' — a discarded governess or worn-out parlour-maid, whose present of tea-cosy, antimacassar, or night-gown case testified equally to devotion and humility, should find herself overlooked. Noticing with dismay that poor Miss Beaver found no place on Judy's list, and that old Mrs. Box was scratched out of her mother's, Lydia secretly purloined a dozen silver-gilt invitations and sent them out unbeknown.

For nothing, she felt, in this season of love, should break the spell of happiness in which the whole family seemed to be held. The previous summer had been one of the pleasantest she could remember. The weather had been fine; the Hampshire rectory delightful; Lady Pomfret's health had improved. Without any effort on Lydia's part, hardly with previous suspicion, a banker, baldish, stout, but spirited,

had laid his sound heart and not inconsiderable fortune (by post) at her feet. Mr. Pettigrew's letter, couched in business-like terms and on very good note-paper, had given Lydia no trouble. 'He doesn't care a pin for me,' she told Miranda, 'but he likes our address. He's been sampling half a dozen young women and has given me first choice, that's all. What style is best for refusals?'

'Write a short note,' said Miranda, 'not more than fourteen lines. Make it limpid; use only Anglo-Saxon words.'

'I see,' murmured Lydia, taking up her pen, 'simple, sensuous, and passionate. Here goes.'

Secretly she wished that Mr. Pettigrew could have been some one different — younger, handsomer — as interesting as Peter, or as charming as Daniel Whiteing — some one who could stir her imagination or her heart. 'It's only the noodles,' she sighed, 'who ever want me. And here's Judy gone, and Miranda going . . . I'm not growing younger. It must be the next!'

With the family barometer (thanks to Peter) so high, Lydia would not have felt obliged to disclose to her mother the contents of Mr. Pettigrew's letter — left, after Lydia's careless fashion, loose on her writing-table, not put into a clip like the correspondence of the prudent Judy, nor locked in a drawer, like that of the still more prudent Miranda — had not Lady Pomfret, slipping an arm round her as they left the dining-room after lunch, said smiling, 'So poor Mr. Pettigrew has lost his heart to you!'

'Oh! I shouldn't say that!' said Lydia, startled. 'Who told you he had?'

'My dear little daughter's face,' said Lady Pomfret.

How, Lydia wondered innocently, on earth did her mother know!

As for Miranda, her fair serene beauty had deepened visibly with her growing sense of security and the process of what is called 'fining down.' '*Helen's Mother*' had been produced at the Stage Society, not without praise, and Daniel Whiteing, in collaboration with a popular novelist, had produced a successful stage version of that world-renowned work of fiction, '*Cockamaroo*', which had enjoyed an unprecedented run. His name, bracketed with that of the famous novelist, had been posted on all the bills. It was, at least, an approach to success.

Yes, the fates had been kind. Judy's wedding day dawned brightly. The omens were good.

The wedding was like other weddings, except that in common with all Lady Pomfret's arrangements, it went without a hitch. In the traditional white satin and orange blossom, a veil of old lace, and the Goring pearls round her lovely neck, Judy made, as everybody hastened to tell her mother, a beautiful bride. The ceremony was blessed by two Bishops; Lydia and Miranda, followed by two little Goring cousins, looked charming in white and blue; Walter Daddles, Sir Deighton Stuart, Paul Trotter, and Bobby Grant, concealing with the stoic fortitude of their island race the deep mourning in their hearts beneath their festal attire, showed the more titled guests into the better seats; Daniel Whiteing remained decorously in a side aisle; Sir Thomas Chudleigh, on whose arm leaned the Duchess of Sark, was mistaken by many for a Duke. Aunt Minnie, Old Maria, and the elderly lady in a beaded bonnet who, uninvited, regularly attended every wedding at St. George's, Hanover Square, sniffed audibly all through the service. In spite of the dense crowd at Conyngham Place nobody fainted. William, hoarse with announcing, gave every one fancy

names (He *must* not call Lord Podbury "Lord Gawdbury," thought Lady Pomfret in a sharp aside). Judy, standing against her background of flowers, recklessly bestowed bridal kisses left and right. And the wedding, like other weddings, ultimately came to an end; leaving a denuded family to press *eau de cologne* to their foreheads, unpack the last of the wedding presents, and say to the courageously smiling Lady Pomfret, 'Well, it all went off beautifully, darling, didn't it?'

Yes, it had all gone off beautifully, and Lady Pomfret had achieved a signal triumph. She had married her most brilliant daughter and she had married her well. She had ensured that her favourite child should move freely among the well-born and well-educated people who constitute Good Society, and that she should be relieved from material cares.

Yet as every triumph carries with it the shadow of defeat, so Lady Pomfret's satisfaction in her achievement was clouded by a secret anxiety. It is true that she had greatly desired Peter Goring for a son-in-law, but as to the mind and nature of that son-in-law she was still largely in the dark.

'Too original to be a soldier!' had been Lord Podbury's comment on Lord Rendall's son: a comment which inspired his mother-in-law with distrust. For Lady Pomfret, who cherished a respect for the normal, suspected that most of Peter's energies would be directed to opposing the habitual currents of human life. A constitutionalist herself, she deplored in Peter a rebel strain; and noted with growing apprehension his preference for living dangerously. Again Peter was a mystery, and Lady Pomfret disapproved of mysteries. He spoke rarely and then only in short cryptic

sentences. To Lady Pomfret, a warm-hearted friend in whom many men confided, Peter's reserve was a continual irritation. 'If he would only be frank with me,' she would exclaim, 'I should be more than willing to take him to my heart!' Unfortunately Lady Pomfret's kindness, though genuine, was without the penetration that goes with fine nerves. 'I can only hope,' she would say to herself with forced cheerfulness, 'that when we get to know each other better he will confide in me more!'

But of these doubts few of her guests had any suspicion; nor, as they offered their congratulations to the proudly smiling face beneath the ermine toque, did they guess that it would be wrung with pain that night, as she thought—'Will he be good to her—will he take care of her? My precious child, for whom I would gladly lay down my life! To whom will she turn now that she has started alone on this perilous voyage—out of my care, out of my reach!'

That night as Lydia went to bed she realized with a pang that the room which she had always shared with her sister was now hers alone. Judy's bed, covered austereley with its white quilt, looked deserted and strange. Lydia thought of all the years that the room had held them together, of the nights in childhood when she would not sleep until, with her arm stretched across the space that divided them, she held Judy's hand in hers. She thought of that terrible winter when Judy had pneumonia, and how she herself, unaware, had slept on brutally, insensibly, while Judy was in pain. She thought of the dreary period which followed Judy's convalescence, when Judy and her mother had gone to the Riviera leaving Lydia forlorn, while for six miserable weeks Aunt Minnie took charge of the house — Aunt Minnie, who

advocated practising before breakfast and put down afternoon tea, and who, when famine overtook the children after a protracted concert, took them to a place called Lockhart's, where they ate, standing up, little cakes covered over with ants; Aunt Minnie, who usurped Judy's bed and made sleep impossible by her habit of crunching biscuits and crackling newspapers which she read, by preference, the last thing at night . . . She remembered the rapturous moment of Judy's return, in a fashionable new cloak with long winged sleeves . . . She thought of the midnight wakings in the depths of the winter, the gruntings and shufflings in the street, followed by a loud blast of wavering discord, which would make her sit up and whisper excitedly, 'Judy! Judy! Are you awake?' 'Yes,' Judy would answer thrillingly, 'are you? Do you hear the Waits?' And how she would creep into Judy's bed, filled with mysterious happiness, till they both fell asleep.

Lastly she took from her album of memories a picture that remained unfadingly bright. It was of a rainy November afternoon and of two little girls playing Door Game in and out of their bedroom, trying to catch each other. After they had run hundreds of miles Judy had flung herself exhausted on to the floor and fanned her cheeks with her pinafore. She wore a grey stuff frock and a red pinafore bordered with white. Her cheeks were pink, her eyes forget-me-not blue, and her fringe clung a little damply to her forehead. As Lydia looked at her, she thought, 'This is Judy. Some day I suppose she will grow up, marry, and leave me, and both our lives will be changed. But I can't believe it's true. I know that we shall be always children and that nothing will ever be different from now. Still, in case it's true, I'll keep this picture of her as she really is, so

that no matter what happens, I shall have her in my mind for ever.'

Now she thought, as a tear trickled on to her pillow, 'It was true after all. Judy has grown up, married, and left me, and life will never again be the same.'

PART TWO

PART TWO

CHAPTER VII

JULIAN CARR

THE evening after Judy's wedding day Lydia and Miranda went to a musical party in Grosvenor Square. Mrs. Munro-Preston's great rooms were never too crowded, her lights never too bright, and her company — friends of long standing — were always pleasantly at their ease. Lydia, pairing off with Humphreys-Drew — who, when removed from his Cambridge friends, could be agreeable and sympathetic enough — sought a comfortable chair and prepared to give herself up to the enjoyment of music in peace.

When music sounds the aspect of common things attains mysterious significance. A tree, a cloud, a human face, appear no longer trivial, accidental shapes, but symbols of eternity. As the vision deepens the listener's senses are bound within a spell. To Lydia, these entranced moments seemed worth a million noisy, bustling years; willingly would she have stayed the flow of time to remain for ever housed in some melodious dream . . . Yet from such trances she always returned with a dim sense of guilt. Was not dreaming a weakness — a playing truant from life for which she would one day be called to account? 'Never mind,' she would say as she yielded, 'let me have but the moment — I'll risk all the rest.'

Now as the singer — a small, plainly dressed, elderly woman with an ugly face and a beautiful voice which she used with a perfection of art — began to sing the 'Lieder' of

Brahms, Lydia looked round the room for a sight which should match the sound. She wished that her eyes could rest on some face which when played on by music would reveal the secret of the spirit hidden within: some face on which thought, or passion, or suffering had graven an image of beauty. Then with a little start she saw framed against the door a nobly shaped head whose outline she had known, admired, and half forgotten. There, she thought, as from her corner she could gaze at him unperceived, is a face that goes well with the music.

Tall, thin, high-shouldered, and stooping, his bearing might have appeared defiant if it had not also been guarded, and there were more contradictions to be seen in the face than the physical contrast of his very fair skin with his very dark hair. If the angular jaw and jutting chin denoted action, the long, heavy-lidded, half-shut eyes betokened thought. To Lydia, his face, with its brooding expression, revealed a nature equally moved to pride and diffidence, ruthlessness, and remorse. She thought, 'He wants something — he'll always want something. But when he gets it he'll throw it away.' The face was young; yet it showed to Lydia as somehow ravaged. She thought he looked tired or ill. As the song floated to its conclusion she turned in her chair, hoping to catch his eye. He saw her; seemed for a moment to stand still tensely, then answered her smile with a grave little bow and turned abruptly away.

'What's been happening to Mr. Carr?' asked Lydia lightly of Humphreys-Drew, 'I haven't seen him for an age.'

'Well, you know,' said Humphreys-Drew slowly, 'he's been very busy.'

Lydia wished that Julian Carr would look in her direction again.

A moment later she was rewarded; but the smile which lit up his face was in response to a wave of the hand from a lady at the other end of the room. Lydia remembered a saying of Tolstoy's that no face could be called beautiful on which a smile made no difference. When Julian Carr smiled it was an event. The brooding look changed suddenly to a flash, hard and piercing. This flash now illumined a lady who was neither handsome nor young. Lydia recognized her as a cousin of her hostess's — a Miss Miller, with whom she had not long ago had an interesting and sympathetic talk. Miss Miller was dressed in black and wore her hair plainly parted; on her face was that expression at once controlled and reposeful which is the heritage of those who come of Quaker stock. As Julian Carr joined Miss Miller he passed Lydia's chair. She smiled again, but for a second time he merely bowed without returning her look.

'Mr. Carr refuses to speak to me!' said Lydia, with a laugh that sounded a little rueful. 'What have I done?'

Humphreys-Drew did not answer for a moment. Then he said, 'He thinks you dislike him.'

Lydia stared. 'I? Dislike him?' she cried. 'What do you mean?'

'Well,' returned Humphreys-Drew, 'he told me some time ago — "I don't know what I've done to offend Miss Pomfret: she evidently hates the sight of me."'

'But how can he!' cried Lydia in acute distress, 'he must know that I don't, that I — oh! —' she broke off. How could she tell old Hum of the admiration she had always felt for Julian Carr? — an admiration, however, which some grain of prudence in her nature, combined with the sense of her inferiority to him, had kept impersonal and cool.

'Well, if you get a chance you might tell him so,' observed her companion. 'He's been through rough times lately, and you know, he's one of the best.'

A tall form bore down on them, and with an 'I say Hum!' Ernest Worthington clapped a hand on his friend's shoulder, and wheeled him round. As he turned, Hum dropped quietly to Lydia, 'Just put it right, won't you?' and the two men went off.

Put it right! But how could she? What in Heaven's name, thought Lydia, should she do? Could she speak to him now? He had left the room. Accepting the arm of Sir Deighton Stuart, Lydia went to the supper room, where a glance showed her Miranda and Daniel Whiteing laughing and supping together amidst a crowd of others; but not the man she sought. She turned to Miss Miller; but this lady, engrossed in talk with a white-moustached Colonel, merely shot a kind smile at her and resumed her conversation and her ice.

Julian Carr had gone.

Lydia felt a sudden sinking of the heart. At that moment nothing mattered but that she should see Julian Carr and put it right with him then and there. But the idiot had gone! Yes — idiot he was! How could a man like that bother about what a girl like herself felt or said? 'Dislike him' — it was too ridiculous! Ah, she thought, with a pang, it was all her fault for cutting his dance more than a year ago. And now he had gone.

Well, she would go too. Telling Miranda that she would stay no longer, she made her farewells and drove home.

She racked her brains to think of an opportunity of meeting him again.

'I have it!' — it flashed on her — 'There's the Beaton-

Belvoirs' dance on the 12th. I'll ask him to go — they're sure to have asked him — I'll do it to-night.'

In her mother's clip she found the invitation. On a sheet of note-paper, she wrote simply, '*Please do come to this.*' Thinking her touch would be lighter and believing that he knew her handwriting, she added no name. Then she enclosed the invitation, ran softly out of the house, and dropped the letter into the pillar box.

'There!' she thought in relief, 'that's done anyway.'

But she awoke next morning with old Hum's words sounding in her ears.

When, after breakfast, she had put the astounding conversation to Miranda and told her how she had written her message the night before, she asked anxiously, as Miranda remained silent, 'Don't you think I was right?'

'Well,' said Miranda doubtfully, 'he may think it rather rum!'

Lydia felt momentarily dismayed.

'Do you think he will think it forward of me?' she asked quickly. 'Do you think he won't understand?'

To which Miranda returned her favourite answer, 'Time will show.'

'I expect he will understand it,' said Lydia, after a pause.

'But I tell you what,' she went on impulsively, 'we are in such good odour now that we might get that absurd taboo against him removed. There was Mother saying only the other day — "I suppose Miranda wants that Mr. Whiteing of hers asked to something."'

'Judy spoke up for him,' murmured Miranda. 'She said that "Helen's Mother" brought out the eternal sacrifice of Motherhood and that his aunt had an income of not less than twenty thousand a year —'

'And it's patent to everybody,' continued Lydia, 'that Patterson is smitten, and that Sir Deighton Stuart has transferred his affections to you.'

'Rubbish!' said Miranda, uneasily. Alone of the family, she disapproved of the encouragement of hopeless aspirants.

'Well, anyway, your quotations are high. So in the name of reason and justice will you please suggest to Mother that she might ask Julian Carr to dinner on the 15th?'

Miranda complied.

'Have him by all means, if you really think you will like him,' said Lady Pomfret, putting Mr. Carr on the table as though he were some not very palatable dish, 'but isn't he rather rough?'

'On the contrary!' returned Lydia, 'he's a most finished product! Baliol — a double first, half a dozen scholarships — what more do you want?'

In the interval preceding the Beaton-Belvoirs' dance Lydia moved in a strange unrest. Mentally she reviewed the occasions — there were not very many — on which she had talked to Julian Carr. The first had been a short conversation after dinner, some three years ago. She had found him serious but easy; they had talked of Oxford and the country round Oxford, and he had told her, in answer to her question, which of his contemporaries he thought would ultimately make a name. The second time, at an evening party, he had been totally different — unexpectedly throwing off fifteen years and joking and laughing like a schoolboy. They had been joined by a friend of his, Philip King — a young poet, with the fair, delicate beauty of a girl; and Lydia had listened in pleasure to their quick-witted chaff. Later, she had asked Julian Carr whether he liked engineering, and he had told her, with his sudden drop into serious-

ness, that it interested him as much as anything mechanical did. It was his job. He could do it; but it was unadventurous, and there were careers that he would have preferred. She asked him what, if he had a free choice, he would most like to be? He had answered with his boyish look — ‘Oh, well — the Akond of Swat?’

‘Or the Grand Lama,’ suggested Lydia, ‘or the Emperor of Rome!’

‘Yes,’ Julian Carr had assented, ‘I could tackle a little job like an Empire well enough!’

Philip King had told Lydia afterwards that Carr was a wonderful fellow, though a bit of a hermit, and generally difficult to handle; adding the chilling piece of information that he usually ‘hated girls.’

Julian had told her that he found it very difficult to know people, except the very few who had ideas in common with his own.

‘We are all of us islands, really,’ he said.

Lydia had disagreed. There was such a thing, she suggested, as sympathy — a bridge that could be thrown across.

‘At any rate,’ he had argued, ‘you can’t get anywhere by means of conventional conversation. Talk — except with the very few who know what you’re driving at — is insincere and meaningless. It’s like bouncing a ball against the walls of a fortress: it may come back into your hand quickly enough, but it never gets inside.’

‘I wonder, then,’ Lydia had said a little resentfully, ‘that you take the trouble to come to dances!’

He had turned and shot a bold stare at her face.

‘I come to see you!’ he said.

Lydia had disliked both the look and the remark, the

singular sense of which she did not at the moment take in, for 'you' might have meant herself and her sisters, or again the whole female sex. But the look she vaguely condemned as 'forward' or 'bad form,' and she changed the subject without appearing to notice what he had said.

She had reflected afterwards, 'What a queer fellow Julian Carr is! The more you know him, the harder he is to get on with or understand!'

And then, she remembered with a pang of remorse, she had cut his dance for John Paynton.

She wondered how well Julian Carr knew John Paynton, and if he had heard that they had been engaged. She remembered uneasily the looks of disapproval which had been cast on her by Walter Dadbury, who had been a friend of John Paynton's, and she thought, 'How I hope Julian Carr heard nothing about that!' The recollection flashed over her that she had passed Julian when walking with John Paynton in the Park; but the episode of her engagement was one that she wished to forget and it passed quickly out of her head.

Now she mentally rehearsed the manner in which she would follow old Hum's admonition. It couldn't, of course, be done quite suddenly. They would have to begin with a really interesting conversation — say, about books. Then she would slip in something easy and kind, that would instantly assure him that she — Miranda and she — really did like him and wished to be his friends. It would surely not be difficult: one had only to be simple and frank!

But as the day grew nearer she grew unaccountably nervous. She wished that their meeting could have been on any other occasion than a dance. For some time past Lydia had neglected the ball-room, for although she loved dancing,

her partners were becoming less and less to her taste. Nature had decreed, apparently, that if a man were light-footed he was usually heavy-witted, or if not heavy-witted, light-minded, which was as bad. Those who danced well couldn't talk, and those who talked well didn't, as a rule, come to dances. Lydia had become impatient of twaddle and had ceased to enjoy what Clough called 'the horrible pleasure of pleasing inferior people.' It was not to make amends for any slighted or negligible partners that her heart beat high as she stepped into the ball-room on the night of the 12th, looking, she knew, her prettiest, in a rose-pink dress with a rose in her hair. She saw whom she sought the moment she entered, but with her sex's quick instinct of deception kept her head turned away. The young men came up to claim their dances and after a turn or two Lydia paused near where Julian Carr was standing and gave him a quick little bow. He returned it stiffly and she thought his face looked pale. Her own cheeks flushed as she looked at him and her heart began unaccountably to leap.

'I wish,' she thought, 'I didn't feel so stupidly nervous. When he asks me to dance I shall try and sit most of it out. Then I shall surely be able to say something easy and friendly that will quickly put it all right . . .'

But the thought of the delicate task ahead kept coming between herself and her partners with a disturbing effect on her talk.

'I shall have to lead up to it gradually . . . (Oh, did you?) . . . The best thing to begin on will be Books . . . (No, I haven't seen it — I mean Yes, I thought it charming) . . . We are sure to have read the same things. Then when we have warmed up over literary affinities, I can slip in something nice about being friends . . . (Oh, will you? Thanks, yes, an ice).'

Half an hour later: 'It will be much more difficult if he puts it off any longer: I can't understand why he is so slow! I have been asked to dance by every one else — only he has taken no notice of me yet!'

The dancers continued their revolutions; the music sounded, ceased, sounded again. It seemed to Lydia that half the evening was over and still Julian Carr delayed.

Suddenly anger flamed up in her. 'Damn him!' she thought, 'this is intolerable! If he waits any longer he shan't have a dance at all!'

She saw him approach Miranda and dance the next dance with her.

When it was over he drew near to where Lydia was standing and said in a cold voice, scarcely looking at her.

'Isn't the next one ours?'

But Lydia's powers of endurance had snapped.

Why had he kept her waiting so long? Why did he ignore her like this?

'Indeed it is not!' she said sharply. 'I shall certainly not dance with you —' she broke off, as Julian, looking at her with a sudden appealing intentness, strangely stammered, 'Oh, but you promised me a dance!'

Lydia's cheeks flamed, her heart hammered. Without speaking she swept away. Far from allaying her indignation his remark had but fanned its flames. 'Promised him a dance, indeed!' she thought angrily. So that was what he had thought she meant! That she had tried to make an underhand assignation . . . How horribly he had misunderstood her writing to him! He had thought her forward — a minx!

A few minutes later Miranda came up to her.

'What *is* the matter with Julian Carr?' she said. 'He has just gone away looking so terribly upset. He asked me to say good-bye to you. He said, "Please remember me to your sister and tell her that I'm looking forward to coming on the 15th."

'He may,' said Lydia angrily, 'but I shall certainly not speak to him. I'm going home now — my head aches. Tell any one who asks that I've left.'

She thought as she rolled home in a hansom — 'So *that* is what comes of trying to put things right! Well, I will have nothing more to do with him — it's useless trying to be friends with such men.'

Two days later when Noble brought in the coffee at lunch-time she presented Lydia with a letter in a hand-writing which she instantly recognized as Julian Carr's. She slipped it into her pocket, and evading her mother's habitual inquiry — 'Where are you going?' — fled to the safety of the schoolroom where she could read her letter unobserved.

It begged her, in a small cramped handwriting, to forgive him for his clumsiness the other night: he told her how deeply he was sorry, and added, in words that seemed to scald her, 'for you see I'm not a gentleman, and that makes me clumsier still.'

Lydia, standing rigid, clasped her hands tightly and shut her eyes. She could not speak when Miranda came in and asked her what Julian had said. She wanted to hide the letter from all eyes but her own, but with her old habits of dependence strong upon her she passed it silently to her sister with a hand that visibly shook.

'Well,' said Miranda gravely, 'you *have* hurt his feelings this time!'

'I know!' wailed Lydia, 'it's terrible. How on earth can I unhurt them again!'

'I don't know what you can do,' said Miranda. 'He's evidently been flicked on the raw. You must try and say something very nice to him this evening — he can take you in to dinner if you like.'

But when evening came Lydia grew nervous.

'Don't let me sit next him!' she begged her sister. 'You take him in and be frightfully kind to him — arrange it with Mother — I will find an opportunity later on.'

But after dinner she was taken into custody by an elderly gentleman with a long bushy beard who had been at some immensely distant period the husband of an extremely famous woman, and, still shining with reflected glory, claimed, whenever he could obtain it, a conductor, preferably feminine, to whom he could pass the radiance on.

But when the company began to thin, Lydia took her courage in both hands, walked across the room to where Julian was standing, and made him sit down by her side.

'Now for it!' she thought, her heart beginning rapidly to beat, 'we'll begin that interesting talk about books.'

Timidly she inquired, did Mr. Carr ever read novels?

'No,' replied Mr. Carr rather stiffly, 'hardly ever.'

'Not even,' pleaded Lydia, 'the good ones — Meredith and Henry James?'

Mr. Carr replied that he found these authors too drawing-roomy and that when he wanted relaxation he preferred to be taken far away. He mentioned a book that had interested him — 'Arabia Deserta' (of which she had never heard), and another one about the Monasteries of the Levant.

As the East, of which Lydia knew nothing, gave them no

common ground, she asked him if he read the Russians — Tolstoy and Turgenev?

Mr. Carr replied that he had not sampled the Russians.

Perhaps, suggested Lydia, skipping rapidly over the map of Europe, he liked the French better? Who did he admire among them?

Mr. Carr answered, with perhaps the faintest shade of animation in his tone, that there was one French writer for whom he had a profound admiration.

'Who was he?' asked Lydia.

Mr. Carr said, 'Flaubert.'

'What!' cried Lydia in dismay — the author of "*Madame Bovary*"! Surely Mr. Carr could not admire that dreary book!

Mr. Carr replied austerely that on the contrary he could admire it very much.

'Well, I couldn't read it,' said Lydia uncomfortably; for the book carried with it painful memories.

There was a pause. 'Now it's his turn,' thought Lydia. But Mr. Carr vouchsafed no word.

Nerving herself to fresh effort Lydia inquired whether Mr. Carr were fond of music?

Mr. Carr said that he was.

Had Mr. Carr, asked Lydia, heard that symphony of Tchaikowsky, and did he not think it very fine?

Mr. Carr replied that he had not heard the symphony, and that the only music he cared about were the three B's — Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms.

Lydia's musical tastes, although enthusiastic, were not strictly classical, and fearful of betraying what might be condemned as bad taste, she passed on abruptly to the region of poetry, where she hoped they might find themselves more at home.

But Mr. Carr confessed that he did not read modern poetry, thinking the old fellows best.

Which, asked Lydia eagerly, did he read with most pleasure?

Without hesitation he answered, 'The Greeks.'

At the mention of the Greeks she sighed deeply.

Julian Carr rose, saying that it was time for him to go. She looked up at him blankly as he stood before her; she knew her chance was lost.

Well, they had had it, she reflected, as she went upstairs — that long-planned talk about books! But how could she ever say anything easy and friendly to a man who so filled her with fear! When she came out to him with warmth and friendliness, he met her with coldness and reserve. In their talk she had been just a bouncing ball hitting his fortress walls, and the bridge which she had hoped to throw across to his island had led her straight to the sea!

'I've done nothing!' she wailed to Miranda as she sat on the end of her bed, 'I find him impossible to talk to — he wouldn't let me say a word. I tried again and again, but he kept me off: is it because he's so infernally proud? Besides, I can't help feeling he hates me — you know Philip King said he hated girls. And I am a girl, and unfortunately, a particularly girlish girl.'

'I think you had better write to him,' counselled Miranda. 'He struck me at dinner as uncomfortable and shy. Send him a kind word in answer to his poor hurt letter — a little line straight from your heart.'

As Lydia re-read his letter, in the small cramped handwriting that bore so unmistakable a stamp of sincerity, she forgot their uncomfortable talk; she forgot his pride in the deep humility that lay in his painfully chosen words. She

found it unexpectedly easy to write to him, even though her sentences were chosen at random, and the letters — formed with none of the neatness and elegance usually bestowed upon her correspondence — danced before her eyes strangely blurred.

CHAPTER VIII

GOOD RESOLUTIONS

MIRANDA's power of divination was the quality in her that Lydia admired most. More even than fortitude, temperance, justice, perfected self-mastery, and the other exalted virtues described in Aristotle's Ethics which Miranda possessed in a marked degree. For Miranda had assured her sister that the virtues could, by dint of perseverance — particularly when helped by a naturally rather low vitality — be acquired; whereas one couldn't, however much one wanted to, become more clever than one had been born.

So when after listening in silence to her mother and a visitor engaged in a heart-to-heart talk about refrigerators, Miranda had observed casually to Lydia afterwards, 'Mrs. Bolton blights her daughters'; or when that brilliant political star, Robert Grimshaw, the soul of Liberalism, the saviour of his party, had been holding a dinner party spell-bound, Miranda had merely dropped, 'He's false,' Lydia was profoundly impressed by her penetration, for she knew that Miranda was always right. It was not merely that Miranda knew by intuition the things that could only be learned laboriously by experience, such as the fact that men who lived alone with their mothers always remained bachelors, or that women who married before the age of twenty invariably fell in love with some one else; it was Miranda's faculty of being able to say beforehand carelessly, but, as it turned out, accurately, of a rather dull young man whom they had not seen for months -- 'I think Patterson's coming

to tea to-day' — that filled her sister with awe. Miranda admitted that she sometimes knew when things were going to happen, and that she always knew when Daniel Whiteing was going to call by a kind of holy calm that she couldn't explain. 'And the strange thing is,' she told her sister, 'that I didn't develop this faculty until I fell in love.'

So when Miranda observed thoughtfully one morning in the schoolroom, 'I don't think Julian Carr will ever marry,' Lydia looked up dismayed.

'Why not?' she asked.

'Well, for one thing,' said Miranda, 'because his best and deepest feelings will always be for his friends. I don't think he understands or trusts his instincts and he would probably make a hash of love. Haven't you noticed,' she went on, 'how much happier and more himself he always seems with men?'

'Yes,' said Lydia, 'I noticed that when he was with Philip King he suddenly became quite different. I thought they went beautifully together, like two colours that harmonized.'

'Or if he does marry,' continued Miranda, 'it will be some one fearfully grand —'

'Do you mean a Duchess?' asked Lydia anxiously, 'do you really think him a snob?'

'Well, he's both a snob and an idealist,' returned Miranda, 'it just depends which way he goes. If it isn't a Duchess it will be some kind of moral swell — some dreary but splendid person who has done something fearfully heroic —'

'You mean the kind of thing one sees in the papers — "Plucky woman rescues horse from burning stables" — "Girl's heroic plunge into Atlantic to save baby" —'

'Yes; or some one who has devoted her life to curing lepers — something dank but sublime.'

'Why shouldn't he marry some one just awfully nice?' pleaded Lydia.

'Because the ordinary motives won't appeal to him. He's what the French call *glorieux*.'

'Why shouldn't he marry you!' cried Lydia, 'you're wonderful enough, goodness knows!'

'I may be,' returned Miranda, 'but he doesn't think so, and I have no *panache*. Besides, in a way, we're too much alike.'

Lydia replied that this would make it perfect since one could surely not have too much of what was good. . . . She too had noticed a resemblance between Julian and her sister. Both had that integrity of mind which gave significance to their simplest words; behind them one felt the weight of their whole selves. Both had something in their faces — a steadfastness, a dignity — which made their beauty rare. And then they seemed to understand each other and be friends. . . . Surely, urged Lydia, nothing could be more beautiful or satisfactory than the union of two such admirable beings?

But Miranda replied that Nature definitely condemned such unions. What Nature preferred was that people who didn't much like and who hardly understood each other should fall in love. This opposition enhanced the vitality of their offspring and from it arose that constant bickering which was a noticeable feature of happily married life.

'So although we might get on well enough,' Miranda concluded, 'we should probably both be bored. Moreover, as you know, I'm going to marry Fish.'

Lydia did know it. She knew that the stability of the moral order, the foundations of civilization, and the progress of the human race all hung on the hope of her sister's mar-

riage with Daniel Whiteing. She knew — for had not Miranda frequently impressed it on her? — the sacred importance of marrying for love; an importance not for the individual merely, but for the Race, whose welfare Miranda had so much at heart. For when women married for the wrong reasons, and particularly when they married men they disliked, their daughters had bad complexions and thick ankles and their sons usually went to the bad. Whereas when they were moved by deep passion — even if they never got as far as Church — they might have had children like Leonardo da Vinci. Hence the divine authority of Love.

'You haven't told me,' said Lydia, rousing herself after a thoughtful silence, 'what you talked to Julian Carr about last night.'

'Well, he began by asking politely if you were coming and then if we were either of us going to the Boltons next week. Then we sat down in a quiet corner and had a long and extremely solemn talk about Death, the importance of living for an Ideal, and the Absolute. He was very grave and improving, like a noble and tired governess, and it felt like being in Church.'

'How wonderfully well you get on with him!' sighed Lydia. 'He never talks to *me* about Death.'

'It's because he takes so little notice of me,' returned Miranda. 'It was like listening to him talking to himself.'

'But I should *love* to hear him talking to himself!' cried Lydia.

'I doubt it,' replied her sister, 'it's the personal note you like. However he did say something a little personal, just at the end. He asked me if I ever went to concerts, and if I would go with him to Queen's Hall next Sunday.'

'Oh! Miranda! how sweet of him!' cried Lydia delightedly, 'why didn't you say you would?'

'Well, because we've got the Fitzroys and all those johnnies coming; and also — though I didn't tell him this — I loathe concerts —'

'Bother the Fitzroys — how few people there are one ever wants to see! One could count them, really, on the fingers of one hand.'

'I could count them,' said Miranda, as she left the room, 'on my thumb.'

'Ah ha!' thought Lydia, as the door closed behind her, 'I wonder if I can guess why he did that!'

Ever since she had written her letter to Julian she had felt easier and lighter of heart. For after all he had got it down in black and white that she and Miranda — she had been careful to bracket herself with her sister — really did want to be friends. He had not answered her letter — she did not suppose he would — but at least he had read it and might act on what she had said.

At the Boltons' party a week later she threw him a friendly smile. Instantly he came up to her in a way that was characteristic of him — with a sudden jerk, as though he had given himself some internal word of command. Catching at a subject which she thought would be congenial and easy, Lydia mentioned Miss Miller. Immediately his face brightened and softened, and he said simply, 'Ah, yes, Miss Miller's a trump!'

His reserve and something constrained in his manner, however, made him still formidable. It did not, as she had hoped, become any easier to talk with him. Taking refuge in a conventional opening, Lydia asked him where he intended to spend his Easter holidays.

'Anywhere,' he said, 'so long as I don't see the human face. The great charm of a vacation,' he added, 'is that it gives one a chance of getting away from people.'

'Do you then,' asked Lydia, 'so dislike your kind?'

Julian confessed that he felt at home only with himself and added, 'Don't you feel, with Swift, that though one may love Tom, Dick, and Harry, one hates the whole human race?'

He admitted that he believed more in ideas than in persons, and vouchsafed an observation which Lydia thought terribly inhuman.

'I can't imagine,' he said, 'the possibility of ever putting a person before a principle.'

'Not even if it were a person you loved!' cried Lydia aghast.

'No,' he answered, 'not even then.'

The entry into the room of a great writer gave Lydia the opportunity of asking Julian whether he, like the author, cared very much about truth?

He was silent for a minute: then in tones which seemed almost wrung from him, he replied: 'I have no words to say how much I care.'

It was his voice, she thought, which with its deep vibrations always reminded her of the silver string on the violin; his pure, distinct articulation no less than his extreme sincerity that made what he said remarkable.

She asked him whether he would care to devote his life to the pursuit of truth, as the Cambridge philosopher, Mr. Pratt, had done? Julian replied that this would certainly be a fine thing to do; 'only for my part,' he added, 'I should want a life of action as well.'

Having met Mr. Pratt at dinner lately, Lydia now con-

fessed to the difficulty she always found in getting on with him, and asked if Julian did not share her embarrassment. Julian replied that he found Pratt simple enough.

'But,' he said, 'there are people I find it extraordinarily difficult to understand or to get on with. Particularly,' he added, 'those I admire most.'

'Whom do you admire that you don't get on with?' asked Lydia wonderingly.

He looked at her but did not answer.

The blood slowly mounted to Lydia's head.

'Nonsense,' she thought, feeling hot and uncomfortable, 'I wish he wouldn't say things like that! To begin with I'm not in the least difficult to understand or to get on with, and secondly he doesn't admire me in the least! Does he really think,' she wondered, as her colour deepened, 'that I'm the sort of silly girl who wants compliments paid to her?' She bit her lip, and in her confusion made a movement as if to go.

Abruptly Julian turned his back and walked away.

'What made him bolt like that?' thought Lydia, her heart inexplicably sinking. The sight of Julian laughing and talking to a girl at the other end of the room made it sink still lower.

'I shall never understand him!' she thought, piqued and disappointed, 'He gets more and more extraordinary every time we meet!'

Just as she was making her farewells he came up to her, hesitated, then said suddenly, 'Do you ever go to the Tate?'

'No,' said Lydia thoughtlessly, 'picture-galleries make my head ache. Why?'

'Oh, only because I'm going there next Sunday,' he said rather awkwardly, and immediately afterwards said good-bye.

'How like him!' thought Lydia, in vexation, as she drove home, 'to mix up Miranda and me! He might have taken the trouble to find out that it's Miranda that likes pictures and that I am the musical one!'

But the day afterwards she thought in self-reproach, 'How stupid of me not to take that hint! I could easily have said I would meet him there — I believe he does want to be friends!'

On Sunday afternoon she went out early and found her way to the Tate. She spent an hour and a half looking at the pictures but missed what she went there to see.

'It's odd of him to say that he was going,' she thought a little drearily, 'and then never to turn up at all! But it's been drizzling pretty steadily all the afternoon, so perhaps that's what kept him away.'

A few days afterwards Lydia received an invitation from Humphreys-Drew asking her to dine with him in the rooms he shared with Julian Carr. As she read the note her heart gave a sudden bound.

'Now I shall have a chance really to talk to him!' she said to Miranda. 'What do you bet we reach the Absolute?'

'If you do, I don't believe you'll care for it,' returned her sister. 'It's not the pleasure-resort you think.'

'You wait and see!' cried Lydia undaunted. 'I've as good a head for heights as you!'

When the night came she set off in happy agitation.

'Is my hair all right?' she asked anxiously. 'Do you think my frock looks nice?'

And off she went in her new dress, with bright eyes and flushed cheeks, leaving Miranda to a quiet evening with her father, Sir Thomas Chudleigh, and the inevitable rubber of whist.

'I am told there is now a new variety of this game,' said Sir Thomas, as they sat down after dinner, 'and that it is becoming quite the rage in fashionable circles. Its rules are a good deal more complicated. They call it Bridge.'

'I fear I lack the necessary dash to acquire it,' replied Sir Caradoc, 'the old rules are good enough for me. Shall we cut for deal?' he asked, as he shuffled the cards. 'And now for the rigour of the game!'

'So you are my partner to-night instead of Lydia,' said Sir Thomas to Miranda. 'Where has she whirled off to, by the way?'

'Oh, she has gone to dine with that not very attractive Mr. Humphreys-Drew,' replied Lady Pomfret, 'and his rather uninteresting friend, Mr. Carr. Now, old man,' she added, turning to her husband, 'if you have finished fiddling with your cards, please lead!'

'Poor dears!' thought Miranda, as she took the trick. 'If only their prospects were a little rosier, what gifted and high-minded young men they would be!'

A couple of hours later as she lay reading Lucretius in bed, she heard a hansom draw up at the door, and a few minutes afterwards burst Lydia, who flung down her fan and gloves on the bed with a gesture of rage and despair.

'Oh, I hate him!' she cried, 'He's impossible! I hope I shall never see him again!'

Miranda put down '*De Rerum Natura*': 'What is it?' she said mildly, 'and would you mind shutting the door?'

'It's everything,' said Lydia moodily, sitting down and slipping off her cloak. 'It would have been uncomfortable anyhow — no looking-glass, cold soup, the room smelling of tobacco, a dull couple called Todman, and Miss Scrymgeour — I beg her pardon — Mrs. Worthington, who with

her deafening roar would have blighted any company! I must say though,' she broke off irrelevantly, 'that she has improved Ernest wonderfully: forced him into evening dress, washed his face, cut his hair, and so subdued him that he never opened his mouth once till just as I got up to go, when he trod on my skirt and tore the gathers out at the waist. It's the only time in my life I've ever been able to make him laugh! Well, Mrs. Ernest held forth all the evening about the Liquor Traffic and Tariff Reform — topics of which I knew nothing, so that I was forced to eat a bad dinner in total silence, which naturally didn't endear me to my host. Oh, Miranda!' she broke out in distress, 'what are we to do about these infernal politics? It's so dreadful not being able to talk!'

'We ought to read the newspapers,' said Miranda gravely, 'Judy always did!'

'Judy,' replied Lydia, 'had Character. She could do in this house what she liked. She could blow up Noble. She could contradict Mother. She could pay Miss Bass sixpence less than either of us and yet always have her hair better done. As for the newspaper — how is one to get hold of it? Father has it for breakfast, then it goes up to mother, after which Noble bags it for the servants' sitting-room and it never reappears.'

'Tell me about Julian Carr,' said Miranda, 'didn't he talk to you at all?'

'Talk to me!' cried Lydia petulantly. 'He didn't do anything else. I don't know when I have disliked him more. First he began about my dress — what material was it — what was its colour — till I felt like the young lady behind the counter. I changed the subject abruptly to Schopenhauer. But he said he thought Schopenhauer was only read

by ladies' maids: so I asked him what philosophy did he read? He said there was no one like Plato, but if one must read any one modern, try Kant. Ha! Ha! I thought, now let us have a dash for the Absolute, but before I could open my mouth he had begun talking most horribly about my hair. Was it a ribbon I had in it — and was it made of the same stuff as my dress? This time I felt like a waitress at Lyons or even behind the bar. No doubt I ought to have giggled and said 'Give over, now!' but I only said coldly that I had never read the 'Critique of Pure Reason' and that I feared it was rather stiff. He said most things worth doing were apt to be — and then before I had time to contradict this satisfactorily (because it's such bosh really — think of lying on the seashore in the sunshine, watching the waves — quite as good as grinding up a mountain), he swerved off abruptly to Sunday walks and asked if I would go for one next week in Buckinghamshire with himself and a party of friends. I said that I was not a good walker and didn't particularly care for Buckinghamshire; and then when he said that his friends would be Pimm, Pratt, and Polking-horne I said that greatly as I respected these gentlemen, I couldn't think of any prospect that would fill me with deeper gloom. Do you know, Miranda, he really likes that crowd! He says Pimm has one of the finest minds he knows! And that Pratt cares about difficult and serious things like knowing the difference between Right and Wrong. I told Julian that I knew there was a difference but that I couldn't remember for the moment what it was. I then tried to tell him why I found that crew difficult to get on with, but he only looked pained and said, 'But you do surely admit that they are sincere!'

'It's no good,' said Miranda, 'men are different. They

wear rough clothes and like killing animals. We don't really understand or get on with them, but I maintain that one must treat them with civility.'

'It's all very well for you,' said Lydia fretfully, 'but they don't make *you* feel as though you were coated with rouge and patchouli and false peroxide curls! But it's not only that' — she broke off, and looked down moodily at the floor — 'there is something — I can't think what — that comes between us and makes it impossible for us to talk. I am always more nervous and uncomfortable with him than I am with any one else. I feel it is a kind of hostility — as if he were fighting something down. You remember that King said he hated girls? Well, I feel he is only polite to us because he hates us; that asking us to things is a kind of moral exercise, like taking a cold bath in winter. He does everything, even talking to people at parties, on principle, and I believe the only woman he will ever care two pins about is that dreary hard-faced Daughter of the Voice of God.'

'Yes,' assented Miranda thoughtfully, 'he certainly does affect the hair-shirt.'

'But I won't be a hair in his shirt!' cried Lydia indignantly. 'I won't be a pea in his shoe!'

'If I were you,' said Miranda, putting a marker in her book and settling down in bed, 'I wouldn't think any more about Julian Carr. I don't think any good will come of it and I'm certain it won't make for happiness.'

She spoke gently, but her tone was firm.

Lydia was silent. Then she rose to her feet, and sighed.

'Perhaps,' she said slowly, 'it won't.'

She picked up her gloves and cloak from the bed.

'Well, good-night,' she said rather wearily, 'it's late and I've kept you awake.'

In her own room she took off her dress, loosened her long bright hair, and sat down before the glass . . . A look that Julian had given her as they parted — a long, strange, pleading look, the meaning of which she could not fathom, came to her mind. For some time she remained without moving, her chin cupped in her hand.

At last with a sigh, she said, ‘Miranda is right. It’s no use . . .’

Suddenly seizing her brush, she set to work energetically.

‘I won’t,’ she cried, as she tossed back her hair, ‘I won’t be such a fool — I won’t! I’ve been an idiot to think of him so much already; but I’ll never think of him again . . .’

‘Never,’ she said at last, as she put down her brush, ‘Never, never again.’

Then she sat down to her dressing-table and took out from a drawer a diary in which she occasionally inscribed her thoughts. Beginning on a new page, she wrote in a neat upright hand:

Good resolutions for this year

1. To read the newspapers.
2. To read Kant.

CHAPTER IX

TEA-PARTY PEOPLE

The Report of the Tariff Commission on the hosiery trades runs on lines which might easily have been forecasted. It is not a difficult matter to collect evidence from the representatives of any industry who, although doing well in the commercial world, would yet welcome any opportunity which promised to augment their profits. The British hosiery trade, as is generally known, has to meet with keener competition from foreign goods than most industries — and it is natural that the remedy proposed by Mr. Chamberlain —

LYDIA yawned.

She was not interested in the British hosiery trade. She was not interested in any trade. Words like Industrial, Commercial, Production, Export, Import — even the racier ‘dumping’ — had for her a cheerless sound, a musty odour, a dingy hue. The whole question of Free Trade *versus* Tariff Reform into which the nation was throwing all the ardour of its intellect, all the force of its passion, afflicted Lydia with the heavy depression with which she was wont to confront a long shopping-list or a column of her mother’s household accounts. Nevertheless she knew the controversy to be of the highest importance. It was her manifest duty as an intelligent member of society to mug the blessed thing up:

It would assuredly be a singularly perverse policy on the part of those who complain of the competition of the overworked and underfed knitters in foreign countries . . .

They sounded pathetic, those underfed knitters in foreign countries, consuming their meagre rations of black bread and garlic; dressed perhaps in quaint peasant costumes, like

the women in the Swiss cantons, or, more pathetic still, hardly dressed at all, like Aunt Minnie's protégés, or the home-workers Judy used to visit at Hoxton . . . Well, thank goodness, there was no underfeeding at Gibraltar. Judy's last letter was stuffed with banquets, with the dinners and balls of which she had been the belle, with the attention of the Governor, the adoration of the regiment, and the elegant compliments of M. Boncamp, the French Minister from Tangier, who had described her (in Rosalie's white lace and the Goring pearls) as '*une véritable Ophélie.*'

. . . it must be remembered that the views expressed by the various witnesses only come from a minority of those who are interested in the hosiery trade. . . .

Perhaps, thought Lydia, suddenly, the servants wanted the paper. It would never do to be selfish about it . . . Anyhow she had read enough for to-day. 'And now,' she said resolutely to herself, 'back to Kant!' Philosophy — even when it took the harsh and difficult form of the 'Critique of Pure Reason' — was at least never dull. One could spend hours in one's bath thinking about the Freedom of the Will; hours on the tops of buses considering the Reality of the Self, half hours, in the intervals of paying the books and ordering the fish, wondering whether green were in the grass, or in one's eye, or in the Absolute, and whether, when it got there, it turned into something else. Then again, there was the Good, about which such a remarkable book had just been written. Was it something that could only be achieved with infinite pain and difficulty, or something that might happen easily and naturally, like a fine day? Was it something that people thought at one time and not another, or was it unchangeable and simple like the colour blue, and two and two making

four? And could it be true that it might be as good — perhaps even better — to play the piano and read Plato as to tidy the schoolroom bookshelf or visit the poor? Or, stranger still, could it be possible that some highly gifted but undeniably wicked man, like Byron, for instance, could actually be more sure of Heaven than a blameless but colourless individual like Miss Beaver, say, or old Mrs. Box? . . . These notions — so revolutionary, and to Lydia's latent Evangelicism, so shocking, could not be entertained without much internal upheaval. Yet how was it, she wondered, that such questions — surely the most important on which the human mind could be engaged — found in society so few earnest thinkers willing to thrash them out? The visitors in Lady Pomfret's drawing-room appeared as indifferent to the problem of Free Will as Lydia was herself to the question of Free Trade. Her partners at dances shied nervously away from the consideration of primary and secondary qualities; whilst Lady Pomfret not only dismissed the Reality of the Self as morbid and introspective, but had her own perfectly simple and drastic methods of disposing of the whole subject of the Good. The Good, in her view, was doing in all things precisely as she directed: being punctual, clean, tidy, well-mannered, unselfish, and 'on the spot.' Nothing else was of the least importance. As for the study of abstract truth, the nature of the universe, and mooning about with books that were far above one's head, this represented, in Lady Pomfret's opinion, sheer, senseless waste of time.

'It leads you,' she said emphatically, 'nowhere.'

Lydia could not reply that it might lead to the Absolute, feeling that this unchaperoned expedition to an uncharted locality would certainly not meet with her mother's approval. Instead she hid 'Appearance and Reality' behind

the bookshelf, and disguised Kant in the light wrapper of a detective story.

Suddenly the door opened and William said rapidly: 'Ladyship says will you kindly come into the drawing-room as there's one or two people there?'

'Bother!' thought Lydia, putting down the 'Critique of Pure Reason.' 'Who are they, William?' she asked.

'Miss Stephen, Mrs. Kruggers, and an elderly gentleman, Sir Cock, I think he said,' hazarded William.

Lydia sighed. Whoever they might be she cared nothing for them. Wrapping Kant in his frivolous jacket, she descended to the drawing-room.

'Ring, child,' said her mother, after Lydia had kissed her aunt and shaken hands with Madame Krasinoff and Sir Pocock Lepell. Madame Krasinoff was making her interminable farewells. Coming at extraordinary hours, staying for unconscionable periods, demanding impossible refreshments, her reputation of having been in the past something of a celebrity did not save her, in Lydia's eyes at least, from being now wholly a bore. Standing first on one foot and then on the other, Lydia waited, holding on to the door handle; at the tea-table Miranda kept up her hard set smile of artificial brightness, while by the fireplace Aunt Minnie and Sir Pocock — an immaculately dressed diplomat of minute stature — waited hungrily for a chance to cut in. Madame Krasinoff gave them none. Holding both Lady Pomfret's hands in her own and giving them incessant little spasmodic shakes, she ran on:

'No, he tell me that soup is death! I will tell you again all the things he say I must not eat. The potato — a poison! The leetle white thing — how do you call it? — *cêpes* — on no account! The truffle — again no. But for salad, it ap-

pears the lettuce is healthy. But no bread, no *pâtisseries*, no —'

'Ah, yes,' broke in Lady Pomfret, in decided tones, 'no sugar, no starch, a diet mainly anti-scorbutic. But you must remember that Sir Donald is full of fads.'

'Ah, but wait!'— expostulated Madame Krasinoff, wringing her hostess's hands afresh—'I haven't told you one half! There are all the things I may not drink, and when I may drink and when I may not! For example —'

Lydia groaned. Her despairing glance encountered Miranda, who gave her a brief frown and then resumed her fixed smile. After what seemed to Lydia æons of time, she felt a sudden stirring in the air. Madame Krasinoff was embracing her hostess. But with the ill-timed generosity born of a sudden relief, Lady Pomfret offered her guest another chance.

'But he does, on the whole,' she said earnestly, as she returned the embrace, 'give a better account of you.'

'I will tell you exactly what, on my last visit, he say —', resumed Madame Krasinoff. 'To begin with . . .'

Lydia's hand on the door handle relaxed. Miranda turned down the flame of the spirit-kettle. Aunt Minnie seized a paper-knife in her hands. The powerful voice drew near its peroration . . .

'He tell me at least that I am not yet to die. I tell him I care not — only that I do not wish to die away from my own country. You can conceive, can you not, the *inconvenance* of an *enterrement* away from all one has known.' She directed to Sir Pocock the appeal of her tragic eyes. 'Could you, for example, consent to be entombed away from your ancestors in a *cimetière* of which you had no acquaintance?'

'Oh, when it comes to the end,' smiled Sir Pocock with a gesture of philosophic indifference, 'six feet of earth's enough for me!'

Aunt Minnie gazed up at his small form with a calculating air: 'Oh, surely,' she corrected, 'five foot six would do!'

From the staircase behind her Lydia was aware of approaching footsteps. The door opened and Noble ushered in Mrs. Munro-Preston and Miss Miller. The hour being advanced, Mrs. Munro-Preston refused tea. But Lady Pomfret called out to Lydia: 'Do feed poor Miss Miller! She's been at a Committee all the afternoon and is dying of hunger and thirst!'

With a rapid whisper — 'I'll look after her — you can go now!' to Miranda, Lydia escorted Miss Miller to the tea-table.

Like magic the look of listless depression had vanished. Her face glowed, her eyes shone. Miss Miller was no mere tea-party person — Miss Miller was Real: red blood and not sawdust flowed in her veins. An aura hung over her neat coat and skirt, a visible halo encircled her toque. Miss Miller — had Lydia not had it on the best authority — was a Trump!

While assiduously plying her guest with little cakes, Lydia began to talk about the occasion of their last meeting. Had it not been a pleasant party! Did not Miss Hillunger sing divinely? And then, while pouring out a second cup of tea, she said, blushing a little — 'I believe you are a friend of Mr. Carr's?'

'Julian?' said Miss Miller. 'Dear, yes, I've known him all his life. A very great friend indeed.'

She smiled, and looking up at the girl standing before her, added, 'I hope he is also a friend of yours?'

Some impulse born of confidence in the kind face before her bade Lydia be sincere.

'Yes,' she said simply, 'I hope so. At least I am a friend of his.'

'I'm glad,' said Miss Miller, with a look of pleasure. 'He knows so few girls. I have always hoped that Agnes would ask your mother to take him up — ask him to meet people. It is such a mistake for him to be a recluse — poor boy!'

'Why do you call him poor?' asked Lydia.

'Well,' said Miss Miller, 'that's rather a long story.'

Lydia handed her a plate of sandwiches. 'Do take one,' she murmured, and then, without looking at Miss Miller, said: 'I wish you would tell me about him!'

'Don't you know anything about him?' asked Miss Miller.

'No,' said Lydia, 'I know nothing.'

Miss Miller glanced in the direction of the drawing-room. Mrs. Munro-Preston, a vivacious and agreeable talker, was admiringly encircled; Madame Krasinoff had resumed her seat; in the back drawing-room where they sat, Lydia and her companion were out of ear-shot and unobserved. Miss Miller put down her cup.

'You probably know,' said she, 'that his mother was a Wingate — Mary Wingate, a cousin of mine on my mother's side. She married, most unwisely, and very very unhappily, a man far beneath her in every way. Her marriage completely cut her off from her own people . . . Mary was proud, she gave no sign. Her husband deserted her soon after Julian was born, but she supported him afterwards by the proceeds of a small business — a second-hand furniture shop. Julian, who is exactly like his mother, was always brilliant. After the first help — he did just accept that — he has,

with all his scholarships and fellowships, supported himself. He was the only thing Mary lived for; they were everything to each other.'

'You say "were,"' said Lydia.

'Yes,' said Miss Miller, 'Mary is dead. She died nearly two years ago.'

'And his father,' asked Lydia, after a pause, 'is he alive?'

'Unfortunately,' said Miss Miller, 'he is. I said just now "poor boy," but the loss of his mother, tragic though that has been for him, is not the worst that he has had to bear. If his father died he would be free. But a few years ago he came back to his wife, a wreck in body and mind, and Mary, being what she was, took him in. Now it is Julian who has the sole charge of him, and as long as he lives — these cases unfortunately often linger on for years — Julian will be very much crippled. He has made other sacrifices too (particularly in his choice of a career), as he is, I need scarcely say, intensely conscientious. His devotion to his parents is one of the beautiful things about him. I tell you all this because since his mother's death, he has been inclined to shut himself up and become bitter and brood. He is very sensitive and very proud; and he has never spoken of his troubles or confided in any one. And so,' she wound up, 'the more people who are kind and friendly to him the better it will be!'

Lydia looked at her earnestly.

'You can count on us,' she said in a voice that trembled slightly, 'on Miranda and me, that is, to be his friends.'

'Thank you, my dear,' said Miss Miller, 'I hope you will, for he's the dearest boy. I have been devoted to him ever since he was a child.' She rose, 'And now I must go and talk to your mother.'

Lydia slipped out of the room. Not even with Miranda could she share the deep agitation that possessed her.

How little, she thought as she went upstairs, she had known him! How little she had understood! . . . In a household of women, under a strong matriarchal rule, her father was the only man she knew; and her father, with his gentle nature and selfless mind, seemed scarcely masculine. Julian Carr was thus enveloped in the double impenetrability of his strange character and his unknown sex. Yet she could feel the power of a mind she was unable to gauge, of a will she could not hope to bend; she could divine, what she had never suffered, the intensity of a tragic experience.

In her bedroom, standing by the window, she looked out at the long street where, in the dusk, the lamps in two straight rows glimmered like tall strange flowers; she looked till their brightness flickered and swam and the two rows were merged together.

'I wish,' she said, 'that I had all the gold in the world to give to him; I wish I had a crown of glory to place on his head! I wish that by any pain endured or joy renounced I might bring him some happiness. If all the triumph of life were mine, I would make it his!'

CHAPTER X

PETER AND JUDY

THROUGH the open windows of an airy sitting-room, gaily decorated with gilt furniture, blue and white Vigo pottery, and newly hemmed yellow silk casement curtains, the hot southern sunshine was pouring. A chameleon, which had been motionless on the window-sill, suddenly darted out its tongue and swallowed a fly. Outside on the balcony a large brown bear was consuming an orange picked that morning. Behind the bear sparkled the blue Mediterranean.

“*Viahaban en coché varios amigos*” read Judy, who with one hand was ‘scrimbling’ — that is, gently rubbing the roots of Peter’s hair, while with the other she held a Spanish grammar; ‘Various friends were travelling in a coach. One of them said presently to the other, “How soon is it before we arrive?” “Mother of God,” replied the other jestingly, “do not trouble about that; it is not long since we have come from here!” Now, Peter, this is called “A Witty Tale” — would you kindly explain the joke?’

But Peter, who was poring over a map, did not answer.

Viahaban en coché. It was rather like the joke that had occurred to Peter in the middle of the night. She thought he was having nightmare and when she gently pinched him he explained that he was only roaring with laughter at an extremely amusing dream. What was it? Oh, that the tea kettle had boiled over and upset the jam pot! He said the joke was a very subtle one: there was something so funny about *jam* being upset by *tea!* But he had to admit after-

wards that he couldn't quite see where the point had been.
“It is not long since we have come from here.” Now Peter,
do you call that a good joke?”

‘Good enough for Spain,’ said Peter.

Peter was right. Spanish jokes were not first-rate. In Madrid when Peter had been military *attaché* to the Embassy, Judy had not been able to stir in the streets alone without swarms of little black-faced men poking their noses underneath her hat and shouting out witty remarks which fortunately she didn't understand. Then there had been Lady Pounder, who had gone into the Prado by herself one morning and had seen two Spanish ladies opposite making her the deepest possible bows. Thinking she must have met them at Court, Lady Pounder bowed back. Instantly the two ladies burst into derisive guffaws in which the whole population joined. And they were perfect strangers and it was a Spanish joke!

It had seemed a joke at first that all the men, women, and children of Madrid walked about the streets every night till three o'clock in the morning and that the express train invariably started at 1 A.M. But it was a little tiresome that one couldn't buy even a stamp, or get a bell answered, or a cab called, between noon and four; after which, though very sluggishly, life began again with that queer but attractive little meal of hot chocolate (made very stiff and flavoured with cinnamon) and fried potatoes — which went better together than one would have thought.

As for the jokes at the theatre! Peter said if she had understood them she couldn't have gone. And the dinner-parties were almost as embarrassing, because with so many nationalities present (as at the dinner at the Duke of San Sebastian's when she had worn her white taffeta and there

had been an Austrian Archduchess, a German Baron, and the Belgian Minister) they all talked French. In the middle of the sorbet the Baron had bawled out, ‘Avez-vous entendu les grandes nouvelles de Monckton?’ What was it? Had Mr. Monckton been made Ambassador or won a prize in the Grand Lottery? No. ‘C'est que Madame Monckton va avoir un bébé!’ Loud screams of laughter: cries of ‘La! La!’ ‘Quelle belle affaire!’ and so on . . . But what was the joke? Well, Peter wouldn't explain. But the English Secretary who had taken her in grew very pink and hastily changed the subject.

Anyhow that wasn't the kind of topic Judy enjoyed in mixed company. Perhaps she was conventional. But she found the conversation of Spaniards often distressingly frank; and when she and Peter asked the grandees to dinner they were obliged to introduce ‘damp courses’ of English between every two foreigners. In the difficult half-hour when Judy was left alone with the ladies, who turned over all her wedding presents — winding up the Kronos clock, upsetting the collapsible chairs, fingering her clothes, just like children — ‘Tiens que c'est jolie, cette coiffure!’ — ‘Mir usted Ysabelle que esto es bien hecho!’ — from the comb in her hair to the spangles on her shoes, they asked her the most embarrassing questions. And they were astounded when she told them how much she and Peter had been alone together when they were engaged. ‘Mon Dieu, pas possible!’ ‘Est-ce-que rien n'arrive jamais?’ — Yet Judy had been grateful for anything which could distract the ladies from the tremendous issue of the Sofa. Only the greatest lady present had the right to sit on it. The Duchess raced and when the wrong one got on first there was trouble. ‘Expense be blowed,’ said Peter, when the Duchess of Calle

Mayor had wrecked the evening by ousting the Duchess of San Sebastian, 'we must buy a box ottoman!'

Still the Duchess of San Sebastian had been most polite when Judy met her at Court.—'Venez, asseyez-vous près de moi!'—And the Court ladies had fingered her pearls and asked her what she used to keep her neck so white? (Silly geese, as if she ever used anything!) She had worn her wedding dress with a white lace mantilla, and the Queen had kissed her on both cheeks and rumpled her hair. (Peter said that was to make her look plain because the King was looking.) And soon afterwards the young King came up, clicked his heels together, made a low bow and asked her (as everybody did) how she liked Madrid? Judy replied politely. Then he said, 'That is a ver' nice little pony you ride in the Casa de Campo, yes? And goes ver' fast.' Then he clicked his heels together, made another low bow, and passed on; but while he was talking to the Duchess of Calle Mayor he still looked at Judy. Peter said naturally he did: Judy was English and everybody hoped he was going to marry an English Princess. She wasn't to think the King admired her.

'Now, Peter,' said Judy, 'you must admit that I am rather pretty!'

But Peter only answered, 'Pretty enough for Spain!'

It was hard work wringing compliments out of Peter. . . . No, he said, he preferred his own nose. As for long hair, she should go to the Carpathians. And in Andalusia the women's feet were much smaller. But he had to admit that he could never see her come into the room without a thrill and that Félice's blue silk dressing-gown was enchanting. But the only point he gave her full marks for was what nobody saw — the line from her garter to her ankle! And

he said she must do her hair low and not puff it out so much at the sides. ‘But Peter, I should look a fright! I must do it like every one else!’ No, he said, that was nonsense; other women might follow the fashion, but not Judy. Why? Well — and out it had come at last! — no one so pretty need bother.

Nobody could believe how charming Peter was in his pyjamas with his hair ruffled, singing snatches of songs and laughing like a child. Had he ever been so absurd with any one else? No, with no one else in the world. They were more in love with each other than they had been even when they were engaged. And this was the happiest time in their lives and Peter said they must make the most of it.

They did! Everything with Peter was fun: riding, which Judy had never much liked (but Peter looked so adorable in his riding-boots) and adventures, which she privately detested. It was an adventure every time they drove in the tandem through the narrow streets, with the wheeler jibbing and the leader bolting. It had been an exhausting adventure riding across Spain from Bilbao through the monotonous arid country, spending the nights in stuffy little *posadas* straight out of the Dark Ages, with the cows and cocks and hens and children all sleeping together. Judy and Peter had slept in hammocks — which took some getting into — and never would she forget the fatigue, the smells, the flies, and the fleas!

But the best fun of all was unpacking the wedding presents in their flat at Gibraltar and turning it into a home. It wasn’t, of course, in the least like the home of Judy’s dreams, which had been rather like Conyngham Place, with a maid called Parker, and a butler called Benson, a victoria, a sunny nursery, three bathrooms and a large country-house

in the background. Peter said that as Gib was English they must make it as little like England as possible. So they had a cook called Anselma, a butler called Alvez, Portuguese vases for jugs and basins, a Basque bedstead for a dinner table and a Toledo meat-safe that Peter had painted gold and had turned into a bookshelf. But anyhow, there was Mother's photograph on the bureau, and one of the girls, and Mother's calendar and the Kronos clock and the collapsible chairs, and Judy had begun housekeeping in earnest. Alvez was an angel — so handsome and distinguished, exactly like Sir Thomas Chudleigh. But was any meal punctual? Never. And did he do anything properly? No. That morning he had made tea with nasturtium or verbena, on the principle that any old leaf did for tea. And he thought that all foods went together provided that they were of the same colour. Coffee and curry powder they had got used to, and honey and glue was just edible, but Peter had put his foot down over the mustard and marmalade. Ordering dinner with Anselma was the merriest affair, conducted with roars of laughter. Judy and she had the cosiest talks about the price of eggs, love, marriage, the nourishing properties of lentils, and her aunt had twelve daughters all married without any dowry, and veal was dear, but chicken would be cheaper, and her husband's cousin was an English captain here at Gib. But when Anselma went marketing she bought just one thing at a time instead of economically in large quantities — one onion, two apples, three raisins, and a currant. But Peter said this was the Spanish custom — they sold oranges in the street two for a half-penny, three for a penny — and that the books would be too high anyhow. High they undoubtedly were, and the deficit rose with tropical swiftness. But Peter said the right principle to go

on was to spend first and save afterwards and that he could always put a mortgage on Harsh.

What would Mother think if she knew? Such a thing as an overdraft, she said, had never entered her life . . . Poor darling, her last letter sounded rather depressed. Father had had a bad bout of sneezing, Aunt Minnie had been nagging about the upkeep of the family vault, 'that Mr. Whiteing' had been dangling about, and Lydia was doing no Good with her life. (That meant that some one had failed to come up to the scratch.)

'Peter, what about having the girls out and finding them husbands?' Peter said that would be quite easy. Miranda could marry an aide-de-camp. Or if she insisted on hooking a fish, let her try one of the nobler species — Captain Salmond, or the Count d'Omar. As for Lydia, General Gunnersbury would be the man for her. — 'Oh Peter, his jokes are so bad!'

'My dear, one wit is enough in the family.'

'If you think you're so witty,' said Judy, 'kindly explain this joke. "Viahaban en coché" —'

But Peter sat up and shut his map with a smack.

'We'll start to-morrow!' he said.

'Gracious, darling, you are sudden! Why? Where?'

'Cadiz, Seville, Cordova, or if you prefer it across the Straits to Tangier. I'm sick of Gib.'

'But what about the Craddocks and the Consul coming to dinner to-morrow?'

'Put 'em off.'

'And how have you got leave?'

'Reported sick.'

'Well, don't let them see us riding off as they did last time you reported sick. And do you think Alvez can be trusted to look after Lucy?'

'Yes, they get on all right. I'll tell him to keep her away from Anselma; she's never forgiven her for flattening out her cat. Pity Lucy can't come too; but she doesn't get on with horses.'

'Nor with visitors . . . Peter, did you know that Mrs. Craddock has had to give up riding?'

'Why?'

'Oh, well ——'

Peter hummed. 'Rough luck when they've just bought an Arab.'

'I don't think Mrs. Craddock minds.'

Peter got up and looked out of the window. Then he said quietly, 'Would you mind having to give up riding?'

'No. I don't think I should. No, in fact I should be glad. And it's expected of us . . . Should you mind?'

Peter turned round.

'Yes,' he said, 'I should mind. I don't want it yet. Not for a long time. I couldn't bear to have to share you ——'

Judy laughed. 'You silly!'

She snatched his hand and gave it a little kiss.

'And now,' she said, after a tiny sigh, 'I'm going to write home to mother. Any messages for the girls?'

CHAPTER XI

SPINOZA

'I WON'T cry — I won't! She shan't make me. I am too old. It is too humiliating!'

Lydia clenched her hands and set her slightly receding chin. She had her mother at a slight disadvantage, for, sitting at her toilet-table in her dressing-gown, Lady Pomfret was without her corsets. On the other hand Lydia's retreat was cut off by six pairs of black woollen stockings which had been presented to her at the beginning of the interview. The storm which now raged was as unexpected as it was violent. For nearly a year life had run with blessed smoothness; and now suddenly, out of a clear sky, had sprung up this typhoon.

What had caused it? Apparently innumerable things which her mother had been noticing with disapproval while Lydia had been wrapped in a false security: her way of dressing — sloppy blouses with low necks instead of symmetrical designs and high, boned collars; her way of eating — fussy and foolish, leaving things on her plate; the books she read, the friends she made, her neglect of the flower vases, her absorption in Self, her deplorable vanity; all pointed one way — to a disintegration of Character, a slackening of moral purpose, a precipitous and alarming descent down-hill.

Lydia attempted no defence. But silently, desperately, trying to keep her intelligence unsubdued by the trembling of her limbs and the rapid beating of her heart, she inwardly resisted.

'It can't be wrong,' she argued to herself, 'to like Bernard Shaw — anyhow Father does. Lots of Rosalie's have low collars . . . I have always hated gravy and steamed things and fish — it can't be that . . . But Camilla Herbert's a *genius!* I *must* admire her! . . . Bother, I did smash that vase . . . Yes, I am self-centred . . .' Suddenly she felt a prick. Powder and lip salve . . . *Touché*. The point was pressed home: turned . . . Lydia shut her eyes. 'Now,' she said to herself faintly, 'if you cry now, you're done for good!'

Lydia did not cry. But when, half an hour later, she emerged from her mother's room, it was in a condition of internal wreckage such as only solitude and her bedroom could harbour. What had become of these new values, which she had been setting up with such excitement and joy? Around her ruined world lay splintered fragments of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Even the Absolute had disappeared. What her mother had told her was all true. She was no good. She would never be any good. The sky was black. No light. No hope. It would have been far better had she never been born!

Limply she entered the schoolroom and turned on Miranda a gaze of despair.

'What am I to do?' she whispered hopelessly.

Miranda had been wonderful. She had said little but her words had brought extraordinary comfort. Silent and grave she listened, and then observed:

'It's the effect of an insensitive mind upon a sensitive . . .'

Never before, either openly or secretly, had either of the girls criticized their mother. They might in public comment humorously upon her edicts and laws, as pious Athenians might make their jokes about the gods; but to ques-

tion her motives or criticize her character would have seemed to Lydia unthinkable.

Whatever her mother had told her, that she had implicitly believed — even when between her mother's words and the evidence of her senses appeared a palpable contradiction. Her mother, for instance, had assured Lydia many times over that she never tight-laced. And so, when in the absence of Marthe, Lady Pomfret had called her daughter to her bedroom, and when her efforts to fasten the skirt which with both hands her mother was pressing and squeezing proved unavailing, Lydia had summoned Annie to her assistance, and the three of them, pulling frantically could hardly make it meet — that wasn't tight-lacing. Tight-lacing was a vice only practised by girls with naturally thin figures, like Lydia herself. Then again, her mother had repeatedly impressed on her daughters the fact that she invariably spoke the truth. Never, no, never, had the smallest fib escaped her lips. As for Aunt Minnie's curiosity concerning the nectarines (which to a distinguished dinner-party in February had added a final grace) and Lady Pomfret's assurances that these had been sent as a little present from Lord Podbury's hot-houses, and not, as Lydia, who had ordered them, was aware, from a shop in Bond Street — were not such evasions, and others like them, easily explained by the oft-repeated phrase, 'One has to use a little tact with your aunt'?

So that even now had Lydia taken the news of Mr. Pettigrew's indecently hasty consolation at all to heart, the connection between that fact and her own disgrace would not have jumped to her mind. Nevertheless Miranda's gentle movement in the direction of free judgment produced in her sister an extraordinary access of confidence. Lifting her

head to gaze once more on the universe she perceived that the True and the Beautiful — a little shaky but still intact — were once more ranged beside the Good. The Absolute, she saw with a sigh of relief, had slid back quietly into its place.

Emboldened by this increased sense of security, Lydia ventured to approach her sister on a subject that incessantly engrossed her. Sir Caradoc and Lady Pomfret's projected week-end visit to an episcopal palace gave her the opportunity she sought.

'We *must* ask Julian Carr to dinner!' she said earnestly. 'We owe it to him. Remember that he did ask you to the concert and that Miss Miller told us to be kind.'

Miranda had demurred a little.

'I think we bother him rather,' she said; 'I don't think he liked it last time.'

'Let us be awfully nice and make him like it — besides, if he doesn't like it he needn't come.'

'He won't come because he likes it, only because he thinks he ought.'

'Well, even so, it will be good for him,' cried Lydia. 'If he does like it, it will do him good, and if he doesn't like it, it will do him good too; since he thinks it's good for him to do things he doesn't like!'

The invitation to dine quietly with Sir Thomas Chudleigh, Humphreys-Drew, and themselves was written by Miranda (at Lydia's request) for Friday the following week.

'Better not say much about it unless Mother asks,' said Lydia diplomatically, 'and then we can always say we asked Sir Deighton Stuart and Daddles, and that they couldn't come.' Neither Julian Carr nor Humphreys-Drew

— a predestined failure at the Bar — were on Lady Pомfret's list of eligible young men.

What else could one do, sighed Lydia, as she posted Miranda's invitation, failing the sceptre and crown, the purple and gold, the burnt offerings and precious ointment, that in a better and more romantic world one would have unhesitatingly have laid at his feet — what else could one do but ask him to dinner? Sadly she deplored the meagre and conventional opportunities of the world as it was. How could one be Simple and Sincere at dances, dressed-up and glittering, or profound and philosophical at dinner-parties, with one's mouth full and footmen handing plates?

In spite of her resolve, Lydia's efforts to obey her sister's injunctions and think no more of Julian Carr had broken down. She must think of him since his image was in everything beautiful, his voice, grave and thrilling, sounded in all the finer vibrations, his superscription showed clear on every fresh page of life's manuscript that she turned. She must think of him; and since to think was to admire and to pity, was she not constrained by the very nature of these emotions to love him too? Not, of course, with an affection of the ordinary kind. No, selfless and lofty, her devotion should resemble that pure and disinterested worship which Spinoza enjoined should be given to God. 'Whosoever would love God truly,' he had written, 'must not desire God to love him in return.'

Such a love, argued Lydia, to her own satisfaction, would, according to all the text-books on ethics, constitute a Good in itself. Yet to make assurance still surer, she put the point in a tentative way one morning to her sister.

Since the love of good persons and beautiful objects was classed as Ultimate Good, she urged, might one not

love a good person all the better because one expected no return?

Miranda had been discouraging.

'If you mean Julian Carr,' she said drily. 'I don't recommend it. Abstract devotion to an extremely handsome young man is pretty sure to lead to falling in love with him and as I said before, I think that would be a mistake.'

'Nonsense!' cried Lydia, blushing indignantly, 'of course I shan't do anything of the kind. I'm not such an idiot as to suppose he could ever think of me in that way — only noodles do that — and I certainly don't intend to fall in love with any one who doesn't.'

Mentally, however, she resolved that since these delicate distinctions were liable to be misunderstood even by a sympathy as penetrating as her sister's, she would in future keep her feelings to herself.

In her diary she wrote that night as follows:

I sometimes think that Miranda looks at things a little crudely. For instance, she can't see that one may admire a human being quite impersonally, as one admires a picture or a book. But isn't it just because I admire and believe in Julian Carr in this way that it is a wonderfully good thing for me to know him? I don't know why, but all this winter I have been feeling that the world is not really a very safe or settled place, that life is exciting and dangerous and that anything may happen to anybody! It is this feeling of insecurity that makes me long for something fixed and perfect that I can look up to, even though it must remain for ever out of reach, like a star. But as for being silly enough to dream of falling in love with him — I have only to think of the distance between us to make that utterly impossible. For as Miranda says, our lives must be guided by reason, and reason is here my very clear guide.

Being thus securely armed against irrationality, Lydia

told herself that she could look forward with perfect calm to seeing Julian again.

But calm, by some odd contrariety, seemed to be the only state denied to her. Never before had she felt so disturbingly, so electrically alive. The ennui, the emptiness, the hopeless sense of her own futility which had often devoured so many unhappy hours in the past had given place to a profound and universal excitement. Books opened infinite avenues of thought; music roused her to unsuspected depths of feeling; her heart, the existence of which she had previously been doubtful, was now excruciatingly wrung by the most remote and alien grief. Lydia discovered with a shock that every human being — even the prosiest afternoon caller — was alive; that all were capable of experiencing unplumbed depths of rapture, of suffering; that life was tremendous and significant, and that everything and everybody mattered.

'What is going to happen to me?' she thought, half in joy, half in terror, 'Am I growing up at last? Shall I come nearer to understanding the universe? Shall I find out the meaning and purpose of life?'

The invitation for dinner on Friday was accepted. Sir Thomas Chudleigh brought with him an atmosphere of pleasant urbanity; the talk at table was easy and general; nor, since Sir Thomas was an enlightened Conservative and the two young men were judiciously liberal, did it ever become polemical. During a discussion between Sir Thomas and Humphreys-Drew on some legal question Julian turned to Lydia and asked her in a low voice if she and her sister would come to lunch with him on Sunday.

'No Todmans, no Tariff Reform,' he said, 'not a restaurant with a band — just ourselves in the simple squalor of

our natural surroundings, if you can bear it. But we'll go on afterwards and feed the lions and tigers at the Zoo . . .'

'Not the Zoo!' cried Lydia in some confusion, 'I do so hate it! Don't you, too, dislike the spectacle of wild creatures caged?' Then remembering that she had asked Camilla Herbert — a strange shy poetess, for whom Lydia had a great admiration — to lunch on Sunday, she added, 'I am sorry, but I'm afraid anyhow we couldn't come to lunch with you.'

Julian was silent for a minute. Then he said with an effort, 'Are you also engaged next week?'

'Alas,' replied Lydia, 'I am.'

With a persistence that seemed to her strained, Julian continued: 'If I were to give you a sheet of paper, would you write down on it all the conditions necessary before you would consent to come?'

Lydia laughed evasively, while she thought, 'There speaks the voice of Duty! It is on his conscience that he ought to make a move back. But I'm certain that he dislikes entertaining us and nothing shall persuade me to go!'

The conversation became general again.

Pleading an urgent case, Humphreys-Drew retired from the dinner-party early. Miranda took Sir Thomas into the back drawing-room, and Lydia was left alone with Julian.

Trying to make amends for what she felt might have appeared some ungraciousness at dinner, Lydia laid herself out to be pleasant and charming. But the more strenuous were her efforts the further he seemed to retreat into his shell. After various conversational hares had been driven, successfully lamed, from the field, Lydia embarked upon an argument about the Franchise. While she poured forth feminist arguments with a vehemence all the more heated from her

secret suspicion that they were unsound, Julian listened with a rather strained patience. The Suffrage he would allow her, but not the intellectual superiority of women.

'They know what they know, I grant you,' he said, 'but they don't know what they don't know. My complaint against most women,' he added, with a side glance in her direction, 'is that they have never been educated and have never worked.'

This remark, the personal implication of which she instantly realized, roused in Lydia a sudden spurt of resentment.

Dropping the Franchise hurriedly, she seized upon the Ethics of Kant.

No, decidedly, she cried, with a toss of her head, Mr. Carr's philosopher was not the teacher for her! His theory of punishment — cruel and vindictive. His exaltation of the good will — which everybody knew made the most frightful muddles when left to itself — his worship of duty — all very well for insects and policemen, but cold, blind, destructive of imagination and love!

'Do you really think,' she cried indignantly, 'that Duty is a satisfactory guide to social conduct? I should think it a poor sort of compliment if I knew that the reason why any one was good or kind to me was not in the least for my sake but simply for the improvement of his own good will!'

Julian gave her a steely look.

'At all events,' he rejoined, 'it would be at least as satisfactory as to know that every deed and word of a particular person was actuated not from any sincere conviction but merely from the desire to please!'

The cold look and cutting tones that accompanied these

words had the effect of making Lydia rise suddenly from her seat.

Julian's face changed and he made a movement as though to detain her; but without speaking she brushed him by.

Murmuring a vague apology to Miranda and Sir Thomas she quickly left the room.

She would not say good-bye to Julian. He had hurt her too much.

'I hate him!' she thought as she went upstairs, 'I will never speak to him again!'

But in her own room her anger changed suddenly to devastating misery. Why had he such power to hurt her? Why did she take his lightest word or look so terribly to heart? What was it that made her so nervous when in his company, and how came it that after all these months of striving to be right with him they were further from each other than ever? When she came towards him, he drove her away; when he made a move in her direction she became angry and suspicious at once. Something was wrong in their relationship: what could it be?

Sadly she reflected that the difficulty arose from the fact that they were so unlike. He was dark, she fair; he strong, she weak; he had classical tastes, she romantic; he was cast in a tragic mould, she in a vein of light comedy. She was in a novel written by Jane Austen; he was in 'Wuthering Heights.' Worst of all, he was a man, and she a woman.

'And man is man,' she sighed, 'and woman woman, and never the twain shall meet!'

The conclusion was as irresistible as it was desolating. She could not accept it! There must be some way of effecting a reconciliation. If there were a difference between them it was for her to put it straight. The fault must be hers:

for was he not perfect? was he not sublime? Well, if the mountain would not come to Mahomet . . .

Mahomet seized a sheet of note-paper and a pen. Sitting up in bed, with her hair falling over her face and a large blot of ink dropping on to the sheet, she wrote to say how sorry she was that they seemed to be always at cross-purposes, and she feared it was all her fault.

Then she thought remorsefully, ‘But that doesn’t seem half warm or sincere enough: it will only force him to make some conscientious move back! And I don’t want anything back from him — all I want, once and for all, is to put this wretched misunderstanding right!’

The words of Spinoza sounded in her ears. . . .

‘Can’t he see,’ she thought, ‘that one can sometimes be disinterested — that one can give without seeking a return?’

Impulsively she added:

‘Please do not take any notice of this letter. I only want you to know that it isn’t the least necessary to be dutiful and polite to the people who love you and wish to be friends . . .’

CHAPTER XII

SPRING

MR. DANIEL WHITEING was a young gentleman of good principles and sound sense. Having some years previously selected from among all his acquaintances the one young woman who most perfectly conformed to his ideal, he postponed, until such time as his circumstances would permit, the deliberate step of making his intentions plain. This forbearance, which kept his head clear for work and the young lady's heart officially free for other and more eligible suitors, was commended alike by prudence and chivalry, and supported by the majority of bachelors similarly situated. But it did remain open to one objection. That a girl might hold strong views on the subject most vital to her happiness, that she might even bestow her heart before it was formally claimed, that she might suffer anxiety from a sense of insecurity — these considerations, however, could hardly weigh on the conscience of normally scrupulous young gentlemen reared in traditional ignorance of the opposite sex.

Consequently when one Sunday morning in spring, drawn by feelings he could not analyze, Mr. Daniel Whiteing found himself wandering in the dingy back streets neighbouring Conyngham Place, in which the third Miss Pomfret visited her poorer neighbours; when, by a remarkable coincidence, he saw her coming down the side street and noticed that she seemed fairer and more desirable than ever and that the strange sweet agitation that possessed him was not without

its effect on her also; when, during conversation, he meandered into an allegory which terminated abruptly in a declaration, and thus discovered that his passionate love was deeply returned — then it was that Daniel Whiteing experienced the strongest and most exquisite shock of his life.

Unfortunately for the lovers, this crisis, which occurred in the public streets, could not be followed by an immediate avowal to Miranda's parents. Nor, since the whole Pomfret family (with the addition of their cousin 'little Grace') were moving down to Devonshire for their Easter holiday the very next day, could the plighted pair hope for a speedy or more intimate renewal of their vows. Only to her sister could Miranda confide the glorious news. To Lydia the event was of more than cosmic importance. Not only did it afford strong testimony that Right could triumph, Virtue be rewarded, and that the Absolute might without a stretch be described as Happy, but it was also the supreme and crowning proof of her sister's omniscience. Faith in Miranda's wisdom had been for her disciple occasionally supplemented by a vulgar craving for some solid piece of public evidence. Daniel Whiteing's proposal supplied that evidence. 'Wait till he asks you!' Judy had scoffed more than once. 'I happen to know, dear lady, that he hasn't the slightest intention of marrying any one!' pretty little Mrs. Foster had purred malignantly on one of Lady Pomfret's Tuesday afternoons; while Peter Goring, who saw no reason for supposing that he should ever clasp fraternally the hand of a member of the theatrical profession in his, merely observed that there were as many good fish in the sea as ever came out.

Well, one good fish had come out! Convincing the doubters, confounding the schemers, refuting Lady Pom-

fret's strongly expressed objection to a friendship which not only hopelessly spoiled her daughter's chances but seemed destined to remain a mere frivolous friendship for ever, the noble Whiteing had leaped gallantly from the waters, and lay there — hooked, gaffed, and secure on the beach.

Never did the Plymouth Express harbour in its thunderous bosom a more thrilling secret than that which made its progress seem to the two girls like the path of a meteor that last day of March. Never did the red soil of Devonshire glow with rosier promise, the distant sea laugh with a huger welcome, or the air exhale more invitingly that clean smell of wet earth and raw turnips which is the country's welcome to Londoners before the leaves are green.

It was dusk when they reached the little village with its straggling row of thatched and whitewashed cottages; too dark to run into the fields to look for primroses, too dark to see more than the bare outline of the fine old church on the hill frowning up against the few faint stars. But long before the rest of the company were down next morning Miranda had walked up the hill towards the village to wait for the postman, who obligingly let her review the contents of his bag.

'Is it Miss M. Pomfret's you'm be wanting? Surely Miss, there be tu here for yu.'

In the days that followed the sight of that pleasant elderly man with blue eyes under his peaked cap, walking with a quick step down the path to the inn, was for Miranda the most significant in life. Briskly he would come to meet her, whistling as he walked, and every morning breathless and rosy she would run back to the inn with an envelope clasped tight in her hand.

'There's nothing like this soft Devonshire climate,'

thought Lady Pomfret, whose own cheeks, under the influence of rest and sunshine, had regained something of their youthful bloom. ‘The girls have certainly lovely complexions. Miranda, in particular, looks to me extremely well.’

‘I do think Miranda’s pretty,’ said little Grace, who liked this cousin the best; ‘when I’m grown up I shall do my hair low in the neck like she does and wear a pale green evening dress.’

‘Is there any one as beautiful as Miranda!’ thought Lydia as she gazed on her sister with love. ‘She has something in her face that reminds me of mountain pools or of a Sunday morning in May.’

Miranda’s beauty, hitherto of a calm and robust order, was now delicately transformed. The visible imprint of the spirit on the flesh, more often perceived as an effect of deep grief, is sometimes set by nature on a gentle soul whose destiny has been exquisitely fulfilled. To Lydia, her sister’s ethereal look was the insignia of her sacred state. Miranda now walked freely within that paradise behind the gates of which Lydia had so often vainly peered.

Emotion is infectious. That which now possessed Miranda seemed shared by the warm red earth, by the wheeling, plunging, crying plovers, by the pulsing sap which studded every bush with points of emerald and pushed daily higher and higher towards the bare topmast branches of the half-awakened trees. It was shared by Lydia, in whose being struggled an emotion and a hope which every night she would beat down relentlessly and every morning would wake to find laughing on her pillow, exulting in its growing strength. It frightened her, this gathering force, so independent of her control, struggling within her with an unconquerable life,

like that of some unborn, unlawful child. A word had engendered it. For words, Lydia discovered, have a life of their own. Uttered carelessly, they fly away, and in their aërial course are sometimes surprisingly transmuted. A word, which Lydia had used in her last letter to Julian Carr written a week before she went away, had begun to smoulder in her consciousness, then to glow, and now was struggling to break into flames. How it had changed, that cold impersonal devotion counselled by Spinoza, with what a dazzling many-coloured radiance it now lit the sky!

Other factors fanned the flame. Miranda's past, which was reviewed with Lydia in their long secret talks: how she and Daniel had often found it difficult to talk; how fundamentally their tastes disagreed; how he sometimes seemed cold and constrained, and had once — unforgivably — cut her dance.

'It all shows,' said Miranda, 'how instinct is independent of reason, and that one can never be wholly sympathetic or really friends with the person with whom one is in love.'

Moods of despair and hope alternated with an April suddenness. It rained; and Lydia was worthless. Hardly pretty, scarcely at all intelligent, morally weak and fundamentally without character, none but noodles had ever looked at her. She deserved nothing. Hope must die!

Out came the sun — and she would remember a word, a look. Life was not always scrupulously fair! It was impossible, outrageous. But was it impossible? Miracles did sometimes happen! Instinct was independent of reason . . . And how could reason triumph against the spring!

The third week of the holiday was enlivened by the presence of Sir Thomas Chudleigh. An indefatigable walker

and sightseer, he suggested one morning that the girls and their father should walk with him over the downs to Spode-Magna, the little fishing-town eight miles away.

The day was fine, the walk over the downs invigorating. Sir Caradoc walked along alert and nimble, his neat legs encased in brown knickerbockers, his stick balanced behind his back. There was something birdlike about his movements, his aquiline nose, his quick dark eyes.

'This place has changed very little,' he said, 'since I used to come here in the 'forties as a small boy to stay with my uncle, the rector. A wild and primitive place — no time-piece in all the village, except my uncle's grandfather clock which he sometimes forgot to wind. A wild and primitive people — all of them smugglers and wreckers in past times. I must often have told you,' he went on, turning to the girls, 'of the story my uncle used to tell me about the Admiral and the good old woman?'

'No, do tell us!' said the girls. And he told it to them again, while they did not listen.

'My recollections are of a decade later,' said Sir Thomas — a tall and dignified figure in grey with a cloth cap on his handsome head. 'We used to drive the fifty miles from Kingstock by coach when I came here as an undergraduate. My mother had a great cult for Tennyson and hoped that he would come and stay with us at Budcombe Manor. But the visit never came off — greatly to the relief of my sister, who told me how Tennyson shocked her by his coarse remarks and improper jokes. You remember our first encounter with the Bard, Pomfret? I must surely have told you,' he went on, turning to the girls, 'of the famous occasion on which your father and I were caught trespassing at Far-ringford?'

'No, do tell us!' said the girls. And he told them again, while they did not listen.

On the top of the downs they paused to rest, and while the two men talked and Grace watched beetles, Lydia lay down by Miranda's side at the edge of the cliff.

'How lovely this is!' said Lydia; then, seeing her sister's eyes grow dreamy, she added, 'You must bring Daniel here!'

'I have,' smiled Miranda, and taking a letter from her pocket she read it over again.

Lydia rested her head on her arms and looked out on the sparkling sea. Sea-gulls bobbed up and down the dancing waves; little fishing smacks, some with red sails, some with white, busily plied their craft; a stately white ship with crowding sails came slowly into harbour.

'That ship looks happy,' she thought as she watched it sail, 'happy and safe and strong —'

She counted the ships on the distant sea; along the horizon two bands of smoke streamed from an ocean liner; another white ship with bellying sheets sailed out towards the sun.

'Some ships are wrecked,' she sighed, as a passing cloud darkened the face of the waters; 'there is no safety on the sea; perhaps there is none on earth . . .'

She shivered a little as she lay outstretched in the sun, her face pressed against the thyme.

'En avant!' cried Sir Caradoc, waving his hand; and they all scampered down the cliff path to the rocks. Down on Spode beach they found innumerable tiny shells — elfin cowries, pigmy cornucopias, rosy fans fit for fairy dolls' houses, the exquisite filigree of a microscopic art. Over the rocks, looking at sea-anemones, helping hermit crabs, dodg-

ing the ripples of the incoming tide, the girls skipped like young goats.

'It's so sweet and unsafe!' cried Grace in glee, as a ninth wave nearly knocked her down.

'Look at you!' said Lydia severely. 'You'll have to change every stitch when you come in!'

At Spode they feasted on eggs and bacon, watched the fishermen in tarpaulins mending their nets, poked into narrow alleys, peeped into curiosity shops, chattered, and laughed, and made their little jokes to their father and Uncle Tom.

'If you feel inclined for a little more exertion,' said Sir Thomas, 'we might stroll up and have a look at Budcombe Manor?'

'What about your legs, Grace?' asked Sir Caradoc.

But although Grace skipped blithely on by her uncle's side, Lydia felt that the walk to Budcombe was unaccountably long. The old, untenanted manor, dreaming in the afternoon sun, seemed full of sad and ghostly memories; its deserted garden and neglected lawns spoke of vanished times and people long since dead.

'I want to go back!' thought Lydia, as the rooks cawed in the elms. 'I want to go back!' she sighed again, while Sir Thomas chatted and lingered.

Back at Spode, however, she only felt increasingly restless. The little town had grown stuffy, the sea was flat, the whole excursion a bore.

'Do let's go back!' she urged Miranda. 'I am so dreadfully tired of this place!'

At Miranda's suggestion Sir Caradoc took out his watch. There was a train home in ten minutes; or they could stay another hour and a half and get back a little late for supper.

Lydia urged an instant retreat. It was going to rain. Grace's stockings were wet. Mother would not like their being late for supper.

'We *must* get back!' she thought impatiently. She could not wait. Her whole being seemed violently tugged home-wards by invisible cords.

The early train was caught. A small, amateur affair of antiquated habits, it seemed in no hurry. Panting and puffing it stopped at a local station and began to unload fish baskets; the porters chatting amicably with the engine driver, the guard having a long argument with the station master. 'Hurry, hurry!' cried Lydia to herself. She could not sit still for impatience. Something seemed pulling, pulling at her heart. After an eternity, the train went on. Another eternity, and it stopped again.

'Race me to the bottom of the hill!' cried Lydia to Grace, as they got out. A giddy excitement possessed her; she fled along, her feet scarcely touching the ground. But as they neared the inn, she suddenly slackened. Her senses seemed to swoon.

'I bet I get to the gate first!' cried Grace, but Lydia let her go.

She walked slowly, languidly, and turning the corner, she saw the inn. At the porch stood her mother, and beside her in the April twilight was another figure, standing stiff and pale, with eyes downcast. As Lydia drew near he gave one struggling look at her.

It was Julian Carr.

CHAPTER XIII

AN APRIL DAY

THE English April is usually overrated. Snow-storms and east winds are the island's portion quite as often as vernal sunshine and sweet showers. But once in a lifetime there dawns a day which more than justifies the poet's eulogies. Such was the day that shone for the holiday makers, the morning after their expedition to Spode — a day when white clouds swam buoyantly over a heaven of blue, when the sun caressed the earth with a generous warmth, and the air was steeped in the sweet intoxicating odour of young green leaves. From the larch woods came the sound of minute guns — pop! pop! pop! — as the buds burst their sheaves. Blackbirds and thrushes caroled joyously, pulling the worms out of the wet glistening grass. On the gravel path the first white butterfly cautiously expanded its wings.

'You must carry Mr. Carr off to pick primroses this morning,' said Lady Pomfret, 'if he has to catch the afternoon train.'

Sir Thomas Chudleigh had letters to write; he would not join them.

Would their father come?

But Sir Caradoc was sitting with his eyes shut and a handkerchief held over his face.

'What's the matter, Caradoc?' asked Lady Pomfret a little impatiently. 'You can't have hay fever by the seaside at this time of year!'

Sir Caradoc looked at her over his handkerchief.

'I'm afraid,' he said gloomily, 'I'm in for a cold!'

Instantly Lady Pomfret's expression changed. A born nurse, she became concerned and impersonal at any genuine manifestation of ill-health.

'Don't dream of going out with the girls, then,' she said anxiously. 'Keep warm and quiet and I'll get you a stiff dose of ammoniated quinine.'

... Left to themselves young people are sometimes a little shy.

Fortunately Grace enjoyed conversation. An attractive small girl, with her wide smile and flaxen pig-tail, she clung to Mr. Carr's arm, plying him with questions.

Did Mr. Carr by any chance collect bus tickets?

Alas, Mr. Carr was temporarily out of bus tickets.

What about engines' names, then?

He could oblige her: Goliath, Baden-Powell, Winifred, Susan, Amy —

'Oh, but an *engine* couldn't be called Amy!' expostulated Grace.

Of course not! How stupid of him. Amy was the name of a cigar.

What was his favourite girl's name, then? asked Grace.
Semolina.

Who was his favourite hero in real life?

Mr. Carr replied 'Myself.'

'But you can't be a hero to yourself!' Grace rebuked him.

'Oh, can't I just!' said Mr. Carr.

What was his favourite good quality?

Knowing how not to tread on people's toes.

'No — seriously!' said Grace.

'Yes — seriously!' put in Lydia, from the other side.

'Seriously?' Mr. Carr thought for a minute. 'I should

say,' he replied gravely, 'that it was something like courage.'

'For girls as well as men?' asked Grace doubtfully.

'Why not?' said Mr. Carr.

Now it was his turn.

Were there any wolves in this district? Mr. Carr confessed to a nervous dislike of wolves.

No pythons? Mr. Carr was relieved.

'I suppose that's a tarantula on that leaf?' he said anxiously.

'Pooh!' scoffed Grace, 'it's only a May-fly!'

'Poor thing,' said Mr. Carr, 'what an uncertain future; it may fly, or it mayn't —'

Up came Lydia with a little green egg in her hand.

'I've found this on the ground,' she said. 'Please who does it belong to?'

As she put the egg into his hand, their fingers touched, and their eyes met.

In a night the world had changed for Lydia. The greatest miracle in life had come to pass. She knew now the meaning of everything that had baffled her. She knew the nature of that force which had drawn Julian and herself together and yet kept them apart. She knew that in her letter she had unconsciously revealed herself and that Julian had divined her love. His presence there before her was his response.

All night long she had lain awake in bliss — bliss that drove away sleep as the noon-day sun drives away a faint mist; bliss so sweet as to be almost beyond bearing. In after-life Lydia was to know a satiety of sleepless nights, but never again would the dread of losing a moment's consciousness turn sleep into an enemy.

'That's a hedge-sparrow's egg,' said Julian.

'Oh, give it to me!' cried Grace.

Julian Carr put his hands behind his back. He was laughing and radiant.

'Catch if you can!' he teased, and broke into a helter-skelter down the lane, prancing and kicking up his heels like a runaway horse. After him careered Grace screaming hilariously, and after her ran Lydia; while Miranda followed at a more decorous pace behind.

At the bottom of the hill Julian stood laughing and breathless, his arms outstretched.

'Muffed!' he scoffed, looking at Lydia.

'I'll catch you now!' cried Grace.

'Don't you try!' tossed out Lydia. 'He'll only bite!'

'No chance of that,' he exclaimed, 'girls can't catch!'

He ran off into a field, with Grace in pursuit, till at last he flung himself down on the grass and rolled the gurgling Grace over and over down a little slope.

On reaching the bottom he sat still. Lydia sat beside him making a daisy chain.

'What are you thinking of?' asked Grace, tickling him with a blade of grass.

'I was thinking of a dream I had last night,' said Julian. 'I dreamed I was in Heaven.'

'What was it like?' asked Grace.

'Pretty much like earth,' he answered, flicking away the blade of grass.

'Who was there?' asked Grace, picking another.

'The first person I saw,' said Julian, speaking deliberately, 'was — Lydia —'

Lydia glanced at him quickly, laughed, and looked quickly away.

'Were her eyelashes singed?' she asked gaily, her cheeks very pink.

'They were the only part of her that wasn't!' said Julian.

'Hullo!' cried Grace, looking up, 'there's Miranda waving. Come along!'

She scrambled over a gate and darted away. But Julian and Lydia sat still. A lark sang up in the blue. The clouds raced across the sky; their shadows swooped over the fields and away again.

For the first time since he had arrived Julian and Lydia were alone together. Neither of them spoke; but Julian looked at Lydia long and steadily.

Suddenly he said in a voice she had not heard before, 'Show me the way to the sea.'

'Isn't it too far?' she murmured uncertainly, 'besides — there are no primroses along that way.'

Julian looked at the ground.

'I didn't come here to pick primroses,' he said.

Lydia's heart began to beat quickly. An agonizing shyness overwhelmed her. She was ready to fly in terror.

To her relief and chagrin, Grace came running back.

'Oh do come along!' she cried. 'Why are you so slow?'

'Old age,' said Julian, holding out his hand, 'help me up!' Grace tugged and tugged till Julian rose to his feet.

'I bet I'll get over the gate sooner than you!' she cried.

With lugubrious groanings and creakings, laboriously raising one foot with both hands, Julian imitated the progress of a nonagenarian confronted by an irresistible obstacle.

'See if I can vault over!' cried Lydia, who was vain of her agility.

She cleared the top, but on reaching the ground struck against a stone, and fell.

Instantly Julian was beside her, his face expressing a passionate distress.

'Are you hurt?' he cried.

'No,' smiled Lydia wanly.

'Take my arm,' he said tenderly; she rose to her feet. As her hand touched his sleeve the pain slid away. The light contact seemed to fuse them together: all her fear dissolved, and as they walked on quietly, her hand in his arm, she thought, 'How could I have been afraid just then? I could walk with him now to the end of the world, to the depths of the sea . . .'

At a gap in the hedge they separated. Lydia thought, 'Now he won't give me his arm again.'

But to her joy, he did.

'Hullo! it's beginning to rain!' cried Grace. 'We must scoot for the wood!'

'Will it hurt you to run?' asked Julian of Lydia.

Lydia laughed as she let go his arm and ran off lightly. But she thought, 'I'll never forgive the rain!'

Even before they reached the wood the tactless heavens cleared.

The sun shone out again, touching the raindrops with gold and bringing out the warm smell of wet earth, young grass, and sweet flowers.

Miranda, by nature inclined to solitude and meditation, strayed apart from the others. Her heart was full of tender feeling touched with wistfulness.

'Happiness is true!' she thought. 'It is as beautiful and as real as spring. But as spring is so often spoiled by storms, so happiness is never quite the happiness of one's

dreams. If Daniel could be with me now, in this lovely place; if mother approved of him and we could be married without any difficulty, that would be a dream come true. But my days of dreaming are over, and I feel there is trouble ahead. I don't idealize Daniel, I know all his faults, I think I know myself. But I do believe that we could be happy together — as happy as it is permissible to be on earth.'

'I've found a cowslip!' sang out Grace.

'And here are king-cups,' put in Lydia.

They sauntered along, Miranda in front, Julian and Lydia walking together, Grace loitering behind, picking flowers.

Taking advantage of their precarious tête-à-tête, Lydia asked Julian shyly if he had been very busy?

'Yes,' said Julian, 'I have. Work is more than a habit to me,' he said slowly, 'it's a necessity. Even when it's odious; almost unmeaning.' He paused, then with a hint of pain in his tone, 'I've tried all the narcotics —' he said.

That mysterious Work, over which men so absorbed themselves, was to Lydia a topic neither interesting nor intelligible. But the sadness of Julian's tone troubled her.

'Money —' he went on, still more seriously, 'there's always that to be thought of, too —'

Money, thought Lydia indifferently — what did that matter! She stooped and picked some violets.

Grace came up from behind. 'Do look!' she said. 'Isn't this little green beetle angelic?'

'Angelic,' said Lydia, not looking.

Suddenly Julian said, in a low voice, 'Give me a flower.'

Lydia looked round — there stood Grace! 'Not now,' she thought . . . Perversely she picked a nettle, and laugh-

ing held it out to him. Julian said nothing, but put the nettle in his pocket.

'I heard a cuckoo,' said Miranda, turning back, 'it cucked seven times.'

'That's seven happy years for you,' said Lydia.

Their way now led them through a little valley beside a stream with woods on one side. Nature in her most prodigal mood seemed to have flung down all her treasures with both hands. Clumps of primroses, starry wood-anemones, spurge — the colour of the green woodpecker — violets, and half-opened bluebells spangled the ground beneath the trees. By the water's edge the marsh marigolds glowed like flames. The chequered sunlight, the mysterious green shade, the quick full song of the black-cap over their heads, the murmuring of the brook at their feet — these sights and sounds filled Lydia with a rapture that was almost pain. She stooped and buried her face in the pure, pale primroses.

'It is all true!' she thought. 'All I ever dreamed is true! Beauty, joy, and love — these alone are real. It is that outer world, mother's dusty world, that is the dream. But I have left that prison for ever; the gates of Heaven are open to me and the key is Love. For this I was born, for this everything has happened to me; this is the meaning and purpose of my life!'

Tenderly she picked some blossoms, thinking, 'I will give these to Julian.'

But Julian's mood had changed. He walked apart, silent and thoughtful. His face looked sad and a little stern.

With her primroses behind her back Lydia asked him shyly but eagerly if he did not think woodland scenery like this the most beautiful in the world?

Julian replied gravely that it was certainly very charming, very pretty. 'But,' he added, 'I like austere scenery better — mountains and moors.'

Lydia, who was afraid of mountains and thought wide, open spaces dreary, said nothing. But she thought disconsolately, 'He does not care about the things I feel most deeply,' and threw her primroses away.

Presently Julian said with his little frown, 'Haven't you a church, or something? What about having a look at the church?'

They made their way to the church at the top of the hill. A light shower drove them inside, but presently Lydia, looking round, saw that Julian was no longer there. Slipping out by a side door, she saw him standing by a yew tree deciphering the inscription on an old grave. Something sombre in his aspect filled her with a sense of awe. 'He's thinking about Death,' she thought. To her light, youthful nature, untouched by care or sorrow, such thoughts at such a season seemed to her incongruous and painful. Silently she stood beside him, and together they gazed up at the grim old tower frowning inscrutably at eternity.

'It gives one an impression of huge age,' Julian said slowly, 'and of something more than time.'

His expression was withdrawn, remote. A chill stole over Lydia. She thought: 'He has gone where nobody will ever find him; he has left me far away.'

Out shone the sun. From an ash tree behind them a slim grey bird shot over their heads, crying, 'Cuckoo!' as it went.

Lydia laughed. 'That's one happy year for us!' she said.

Smilingly, trustfully, her hands clasped together, she gazed up in his face. He gave her a long look — a look of

joy and triumph which chased the sadness from his eyes as the sunshine had chased away the rain . . . Ah well! she thought, he might triumph if he pleased: she was his captive for ever and ever.

Miranda came out of the church.

'It's time,' she said, 'we went back.'

Back they went. Once more the day had changed. A chill wind stirred the larch trees; a few drops fell. Soon afterwards Mr. Carr shouldered his knapsack and said good-bye.

Lydia walked with him to the gate. In a voice the others could not hear, 'I shall see you in London,' he said.

He was gone. She was left with the memory of his look, his voice, and the touch of his hand which had held hers in his,

'But as long as all may,
Or so very little longer!'

CHAPTER XIV

STORMS

'O WILLIAM, will you please tell her ladyship that old Mrs. Henry is here and would much like to speak to her!' panted Lydia, seizing William by the sleeve.

Old Maria was a straw, and she knew it; but in her desperation Lydia clutched at straws. For nearly two hours, like a she-wolf baffled in the defence of her young, Lydia had ramped up and down the staircase, while behind the closed doors of the drawing-room, gentle, patient, and steadfast, Miranda was fighting for her love.

Mr. Daniel Whiteing's suit had met with the worst possible reception. As a son-in-law he was declared to be preposterous: his income precarious, his profession deplorable; his wealthy relative — without whose definitely guaranteed promise of support no upright parent could possibly consent to an engagement — had proved elusive and reticent, living mysteriously in Monmouthshire, and never, so it turned out, having been on particularly good terms with her sister, Daniel's mother. This bedrock objection on which all the others were based, remained, however, decently obscured; while over the shifting sands of controversy day by day, hour by hour, Miranda had patiently balanced and dodged.

First, the whole conception of 'love' was pooh-poohed. Mr. Whiteing was a mere girlish fancy. Miranda was far too young to know her own mind. When the fact that Miranda was the age that her mother and Judy had been when they married, and that she had loved Daniel steadily

for nearly five years, was emphatically stated, Lady Pomfret turned to the notorious flimsiness of Mr. Whiteing's affections.

He was a flirt, without stability or principle, bound to make any girl who was foolish enough to marry him wretched. When, with the white flag of distress changing to an indignant rose, Miranda had defended her lover's character, the ground would shift to Mr. Whiteing's profession. A shady Bohemian, keeping all hours, dissolute, probably drunken, consorting with every kind of disreputable person — what sort of home would he be likely to make for a girl brought up with every care and reared on the highest moral standard? Gently Miranda would point out that Mr. Whiteing, who had only walked the boards of Her Majesty's for eighteen months and had definitely quitted the stage for ever, now lived in excellent rooms in Ryder Street with a perfectly respectable solicitor. Lady Pomfret then turned to the grisly issue of Grinding Poverty and the certain prospect of Miranda, deserted, or a widow, left helpless and starving with six little children . . .

By herself, meeting each point with patience and firmness, Miranda could have kept her head clear above the unquenchable torrent of her mother's eloquence. But unfortunately for all three, Lady Pomfret and Mr. Whiteing had been constrained to meet. Only once; but fatally. Mr. Whiteing, whose charm was unequivocally acknowledged by a large circle of acquaintances, was Welsh. He had a temper. Like the little animal in the French natural history book, he was wicked: when attacked, he defended himself. He denied that the writing of plays was immoral. He denied that he had wantonly trifled with the affections of a dozen young ladies. He denied that in offering to relieve Lady

Pomfret of the care of a daughter whose future was almost totally unprovided for he was wilfully insulting the memory of the late Bishop of Boundel. He was heated. He was pert. The uproar had been terrific.

Miranda's burden was thereafter doubled. Not only had she to spend the whole of her morning trying to explain and excuse Mr. Whiteing to her mother, but the larger part of her afternoon trying to explain and excuse her mother to Mr. Whiteing. Between these two implacable enemies, neither of whom would show the other the slightest quarter, her health and strength were wearing away.

Every morning in the drawing-room:

'No, Mother darling, it is not in the least a passing fancy. There is no parallel whatever between myself and Lydia . . . No, Mother, Daniel does *not* drink! That is an utter illusion . . . Never . . . Only whist, very badly and not for money . . . He has never flirted with actresses . . . He dislikes late hours . . . He is most particular about his food . . . No, Mother, Daniel's father was not a house-agent. He was an *architect* . . . Then Mrs. Foster must have made a mistake . . . No, Mother, he would never ill-treat me! Indeed, indeed I know him ——'

And Miranda would gently endeavour to substitute for the contorted mask of a Roscius-Silenus-Nero, which Lady Pomfret believed to be the authentic likeness of Mr. Whiteing, the guileless countenance of the extremely small child which Miranda knew to be the essential Daniel.

Every afternoon in Kensington Gardens:

'No, Daniel, I will not have you calling Mother a Messalina . . . Nonsense — she cares for me very much . . . I'm quite sure she doesn't . . . You must remember how ill she is . . . She may be a little worldly (don't snort!), and she

very naturally, very properly, is obliged to think a good deal about money — Daniel, if you kick the chairs about like that the Park Keeper will turn us out —'

And the next day all over again.

'The real trouble,' Miranda said wearily to Lydia in the schoolroom, 'is that Mother and Daniel are so much alike. They have the same high material standards, the same social prejudices, the same obstinacy, the same good heart, the same total lack of imagination. If only they did not dislike each other they could be such good friends!'

The crisis in the lives of both the sisters had begun to break down the powerful repressions that had hitherto sealed their lips. Such rare and cautious criticism of their mother as had previously passed between them was veiled by the periphrase 'They' or even more vaguely 'Conyngham Place.'

'The mistake They make,' Miranda had sometimes brought herself to observe, 'is in thinking we are still children now that we are all grown-up.'

Or Lydia with temerity would remark, 'It's the Conyngham Place taste in fiction that I think so bad!'

Now with increasing boldness they exposed their minds:

'What Mother really wants,' said Miranda, 'is that I should keep Daniel dangling till I have succeeded in attracting some one better. She doesn't want me to throw him over definitely in case I might never get another chance; but she doesn't care in the least how long we are both kept in this agonizing suspense.'

'But Mother can't really understand!' cried Lydia in acute distress. 'You haven't made her see! I know she's maddeningly difficult to talk to, and seems often dreadfully dense, but I feel sure if she really understood that

it was a matter of life and death for you she would give way!'

Miranda was silent.

Lydia thought, 'I don't believe Miranda has known how to reach Mother. She has so little faith in human nature herself. But people are not unkind, only stupid. I am quite sure Mother would relent if she could only see!'

Secretly Lydia determined to put her faith to the touch-stone.

'I myself must try and speak to Mother!' she thought. 'It will be the most terrible thing I've ever done in my life; but Kant says "What I ought, I can," and Julian said what he admired most was courage. If I can succeed in making Mother see, it will surely all come right. I must have courage and faith!'

Lydia nerved herself for the ordeal.

One Sunday morning when the heavy odour of roasting beef deepened the natural heaviness of the Sabbath atmosphere, Miranda was summoned to the drawing-room to speak to her mother.

'Don't go,' said Lydia, seeing her sister's face whiten. 'Stay where you are. I'll go down and speak to Mother myself.'

This was the hour!

As Lydia felt for the drawing-room handle, with shaking knees and closed eyes, she whispered, 'What I ought, I can.'

She opened the drawing-room door.

Lady Pomfret was sitting upright on the sofa, cutting a large book with an ivory paper knife. Ill and suffering, she should have been in the country, free from excitement and worry. Her state of health, the shock of encountering opposition from the most docile of her daughters, the unsuitability

of the match, and above all, the impertinence of the suitor, had conspired to inflame her temper. Yet she had that morning sent for Miranda determined to approach her in a more conciliatory spirit. The volume of sermons she had been reading, together with a letter from her friend Emma Fanshaw, written from abroad, alluding to 'that charming young Mr. Whiteing, the nephew of my dear eccentric, but alas, childless, old school-friend, Harriet Morgan-Lloyd,' had produced their effect. But as Lydia entered she looked up and said in surprise, 'Well, what do you want?'

'I want to ask you,' said Lydia, in a dry, choked voice, 'not to oppose Miranda's engagement. It is really serious — I mean, they do love each other — and that makes it frightfully important that they should marry —' She broke off, her heart beating like a pump.

Lady Pomfret shut her book.

'And why this hysterical excitement over Miranda?' she said severely. 'Miranda is surely capable of speaking to me without any assistance from you! And really, Lydia,' she continued, looking at the flushed and agitated face before her, 'this is neither the occasion nor the time of day for such ridiculous outbursts —'

'It's because I know how important it is,' cried Lydia, in a trembling voice, 'because they can't break it off now! Not when they love each other — not when they have kissed each other —'

A loud, contemptuous exclamation from her mother cut Lydia short.

'Pecksniff!'

Lydia was not a student of Dickens and was unaware that her mother had always assumed that the brief and abortive engagement with John Paynton had been sealed in the cus-

tomary way. Like nearly all the girls reared in the tradition of her day, Lydia was ignorant of kisses; like these, she believed that the kiss of love was sacred.

'Don't you see,' she persisted shakily, 'that you can't oppose it now. It's gone too deep — they care too much. You can't oppose it. It — it's *wrong* of you to oppose it —'

'*You!*' cried her mother, outraged. 'Who are *you* that you should dare criticize me! By what presumption do you — of all people — interfere in a matter with which you have absolutely no concern!'

'It's because I love Miranda!' cried Lydia, trembling violently and almost shouting, 'because I would die for her!' She clasped her hands in an attitude of prayer.

'I beseech you, Mother,' she exclaimed in a breaking voice, 'not to stand in the way of Miranda's happiness!'

Even as she played her last card Lydia knew that she had failed....

Ten minutes afterwards a dishevelled figure blindly groped her way upstairs.

'I shan't want my lunch,' she just managed to exclaim later, as Annie knocked on the door to tell her that the bell had gone.

Then she remembered that her father was lurching out, and that Miranda would be left to face her mother alone.

'What I ought ——'

She dragged her limbs from the bed.

... 'It's all been put back,' sighed Miranda, the next day, as she returned pale and exhausted from the drawing-room. She and Daniel might not announce their engagement, might not meet except outdoors, might not hope for any

settlement until the financial rock on which Daniel and Lady Pomfret split had been submerged.

'I can't understand,' said Lydia, in a low, shaking voice. 'Mother doesn't care about happiness, she doesn't care about love, she doesn't really care about *you!*'

'Of course,' said Miranda calmly, 'Mother is my enemy. I don't honestly think she would have any scruples about what she said or did if only she could succeed in spiking Daniel's guns.'

'Then why does she pretend to have such high standards of conduct?' cried Lydia indignantly.

'It isn't pretence: she does really love goodness. Only unfortunately Christianity and worldliness won't coincide. It's Mother's determination to make them do so that has often such an unfortunate effect on her conversation.'

'You mean,' said Lydia sombrely, 'that Mother is a hypocrite!'

'I think she genuinely deceives herself. That is why she is able to impress others as she does. She makes people believe what she wishes them to believe and she ends in believing it herself.'

'That's worse,' said Lydia, with a profound sigh; 'that's the Lie in the Soul. What I can't understand,' she went on presently, 'is how you can be so gentle and patient with Mother when she cares so little about what she says and does to you!'

Miranda did not answer. It is not always easy to show reason for the reasons of the heart.

'I think,' she said after a pause, 'that Mother does care really. But you see, ever since she has married she has had absolutely her own way. And naturally any opposition seems to her wicked.'

'In fact,' said Lydia, 'she's like God.'

'Very. You remember that God admitted frankly that He was inordinately jealous. And you know what happened when the angels wanted to have their own way.'

'But you've always been such a *good* angel!' wailed Lydia.

'That makes it all the worse. Satan bore an excellent character in Heaven at first.'

'Anyhow God didn't profess to be a liberal, or spend so much money on food, or pretend that the only thing that mattered was Character when it was really money all the time! Money!' cried Lydia in rising passion, 'what a thing to care about! Why, when the only thing of real importance to happiness is personal relations, why should this be sacrificed to ridiculous trifles like incomes, life insurances, houses, furniture — Heaven knows what! How can any one think money important? What does it matter being poor!'

Miranda answered gently, 'I think money does matter. It's all very well for us who have never tried it to make light of poverty; but the people who have will tell you that it's very nasty, and of course Mother doesn't want us to suffer.'

'But you are suffering!' blazed out Lydia. 'Isn't it much worse to have your happiness turned to misery like this, than to live in the country with a house-parlourmaid and have only three courses for dinner instead of six? It's because people are all Materialists. They only care for Things — not for feelings or ideas. Look at Mother — putting Life Insurance before Love!'

With a sob she flung out of the room.

Lydia was passionate and exalted. For the first time in her life she understood the meaning of anger. That Miranda, the gentle and uncomplaining, Miranda who had patiently waited long years for her happiness, should be subjected to

daily, hourly torment filled her sister with a primitive rage. She became a fury and a Manichee. Miranda, Julian, and True Love stood for the principle of Light; her Mother, Worldliness, Hypocrisy, and Materialism, for the Power of Darkness. With a resounding crack the veil of the temple of filial piety was irretrievably rent; the solid structure on which her mother's authority was based was shattered to fragments. In a horror which yet contained some measure of exultation Lydia stared at the ruins.

Meanwhile Miranda, equally exposed to contending passions, kept her head. She was gentle, patient, adroit, soothing, firm, conciliatory. She agreed to postpone the engagement. She agreed to live in the country. She agreed to spend the six months preceding her marriage at a school of domestic economy, where a thorough course of scouring floors, cleaning fish, and skinning rabbits would teach her something of the meaning of Grinding Poverty. But she could not — no, she could not — stand any more scenes.

In rage and anguish Lydia tried to cut short these hours of martyrdom. She would slam doors, smash crockery, dash into the drawing-room on imaginary pretexts. Then Lady Pomfret would conduct the interviews in her bedroom and they would continue far into the night. Miranda grew pale and wan.

In desperation Lydia sought for help outside. Surely in all London there would be found some one to plead the cause of True Love?

But all London was solidly behind Lady Pomfret.

Three Bishops, a couple of Cabinet Ministers, any number of Generals, Peers, and Peeresses, and two successful Head Mistresses ranged themselves dauntlessly on the Mother's side.

The Bishops came to tea, censured the Revolt of the Daughters, and were distressed to hear such bad accounts of Lady Pomfret's health. The Army counselled strong measures. Lord Podbury said, 'Damn 'em!' Lady Pounder was appalled! The Head Mistresses both sent for Lydia and gave her a long and serious lecture on the duties of daughters, reverence to parents, and the virtues of self-sacrifice.

'You should consider,' said Miss Beesly, 'how dangerous for your mother is the slightest agitation!'

'It's incredible to me,' said Miss Naule, 'that any girl can weigh her own happiness against her parent's sufferings.'

Lady Pomfret had all the guns.

Yet in spite of defeat, Miranda held firm and Lydia kept faith.

Love had effected one of those spiritual convulsions which bring about conversion. The moral passion, which in normally developed characters usually attains its highest pitch towards adolescence, having passed her over then, fell upon Lydia now with extra severity. There before her, marked with unerring letters, stood those inflexible sign-posts Right and Wrong. Henceforth she would follow Right. For was she not saved! Saved from her recurring fits of gloom and despondency, the deep-seated sense of her own futility, saved from that horror at which she had barely glanced, of being left at home without her sisters, saved from that unthinkable disgrace, which could raise a cold sweat in every girl when she woke up at night, of never being married at all! Now she thought in rapture, 'Miranda and I will be married together. We will have a double wedding . . . how perfect that will be! No more of this heavy house, so like a prison — no more terror and repression. We shall escape for ever!

We shall be free!' Another thought came to warm and uplift her. She had prayed that she might make Julian happy. Had not her prayers been answered? Her love for him — she could not help knowing — had filled him with happiness and pride.

Nor was the mutual love of Julian and herself the only revelation. She began to fathom something of the very nature of that mysterious, irresistible, cosmic force that binds all living creatures to its savage and holy ends. The body, which she had hitherto thought of as shameful, was now a sacred vessel on Love's altar. 'I understood nothing before,' she thought in wonder, 'but now I know!' The pattern of her own life which she perceived exquisitely unrolled before her was an example of the perfect pattern of the Universe. Love was that hidden goal towards which all creation was striving: its search was the secret behind the mask of faces; its ecstasy, the burden of music, the glory of summer; its eternity, the message of the stars.

Exaltation and abasement reigned alternately in Lydia's breast. She was worthless. Yet was she not raised above all women? Since Julian loved her there must exist in her some potentiality of goodness. If she were not worthy now, she could become so. She must *make* herself good!

There was everything to be done.... Fortitude, self-denial, courage, great-mindedness and perfected self-mastery must be acquired without delay. Instantly she must cure herself of vanity, greed, idleness, and weakness of character. Could it be achieved? Yes: for a hero in glittering armour had sprung into being in her soul. Armed with his sword she could dare anything. Miracles could happen — had not one happened to her? 'From now onward,' Lydia told herself firmly, 'I will never speak anything but

the truth.' Austerely she brushed away the little curl that she used to train on her forehead. With the gesture of a Calvin she threw her powder puff and lipstick into the fire. She abandoned sweets, novel reading, and the practice of putting her feet on the fire-guard. She forced herself to sit upright on her chair. She took on all Miranda's duties — the wine, the stationery case, and her horrible district. 'What I ought, I can,' she said to herself when she wavered, using the uncompromising words of Kant. She, who had always leaned on others, must now be their support. She must comfort and cheer Miranda. Above all, she must Work!

Had not Julian said to her, 'My complaint against most women is that they have had no education and have never worked'?

Critically Lydia considered her education . . . The piano, a little French, arithmetic up to decimals, after which she had stopped; history ending with the reign of Charles I, because after that Miss Beaver had gone back to the Romans; geography: maps, very neat and beautifully coloured, with lovely mountain ranges looking like caterpillars . . . Then, at seventeen, a finishing school in Paris: talking English-American French with English and American girls: learning how to enter a room, to open a door, to make a slight bow and a deep curtsey, and — in the capacity of *demoiselle d'honneur* — how to hand round the plate in Church. . . .

Armed with these qualifications she boldly entered a registry office, where a tight-lipped secretary in *pince-nez* shot out the embarrassing question, 'Have you matriculated?'

'No.'

'You said something about music — I suppose you have passed your L.R.A.M.?'

'No.'

'Foreign languages — French, Italian, German?'

Lydia replied that she had only a little French.

'I'm afraid,' said the secretary briskly, 'that without certificates or qualifications you may find it difficult to obtain a post as teacher. I will, however, note your address and if I hear of anything in the nature of a light companioning job, I will let you know. In the meantime,' she continued, 'the only thing I can suggest is that you might care to exercise pet dogs in the Park? Many people find it difficult to spare their servants to exercise their pets regularly, and if you could combine the dogs of one or two households no doubt it would be possible to get this to do. The pay is, of course, not high ——'

Lydia thanked her and went disconsolately away.

'If I can't get work outside,' she thought, 'I must work at home.' She could at least do French Grammar every morning, practise scales before her mother came downstairs, and concentrate her wandering mind on reading difficult books . . . She had the Good Will. She had Faith and Love. Something might turn up; the secretary had promised to let her know . . .

And the Secretary, who had previously looked up Lydia's parentage and connections in 'Who's Who,' shortly afterwards forwarded Lydia a letter written in violet ink in a sprawling handwriting addressed from Kilburn Park. The writer of the letter requested the services of a young lady of refined manners and good social position to act as companion to her seventeen-year-old daughter. 'My daughter's education is practically completed,' the letter went on, 'but

of course I am anxious that she should keep up her music and French.' The secretary added in a note that as the post seemed one that Miss Pomfret might suitably fill, she might perhaps care to apply?

But the post, although suitable, was not applied for; nor did the letter, though plainly addressed in a perfectly legible handwriting and placed, by Noble, with all the other letters on a table outside the drawing-room, receive an answer; as it never reached Lydia's hand.

CHAPTER XV

A JULY NIGHT

'I sowed the seeds of love,
 I sowed them in the Spring,
I scattered them far in the sweet springtide
 When the small birds sweetly sing,'

sang Lydia on one of the rare delightful afternoons when she was alone in the house.

'My garden was planted fair,
 With the rose and lily gay
But by there came a false young man
 And stole them all away.'

'Pretty,' thought Lydia, 'but inappropriate.' She turned to another.

'Oh waly, waly, but love is bonny,
A little while when it is new
But when it is old it waxeth cold,
And fades away like morning dew.

'I leaned my back against an oak;
I thought it was a trusty tree
But first it bent and then it broke,
So my true love did lichtlie me!'

Inappropriate again! Lydia wondered why all her favourite songs should be about false loves and broken hearts, and why she had always thought these so much deeper and more beautiful than songs about happy love. Now she wanted one that should be joyous and triumphant,

expressive of infinite goodness and eternal fidelity. She could not find it. Strange that the trusty oak against which she leaned should have inspired no laureate!

Love, which filled Lydia with exalted faith and super-human courage, had endowed her with a new faculty. Like Miranda she had become *clairvoyante*, knowing beforehand when she would see Julian, when she would hear from him, and what would be his mood when they met. Yet this faculty revealed only the aspect of himself that he turned to her. His inward nature remained inaccessible, mysterious. Certain qualities, however, had become clear.

Julian was deliberate, cautious, and secretive. His answers to Lydia's letters were always delayed; their wording was brief and formal. In company he avoided being seen with her. One afternoon he called to ask Sir Caradoc to lend him a book on the Egyptian Question. Sir Caradoc was not at home; but Lady Pomfret, who received him, invited him to dine quietly and discuss the subject — which was one that interested her husband — on Thursday, the night after next. When Lydia heard that she had missed seeing Julian, and that on the night he was invited she would not be at home, she wrote at once reproaching him for coming on Thursday, the one evening in the week when she would be away. Hurrying home from her dinner-party she found to her astonishment that he had not come. But the next afternoon he called, saying coolly that he had quite forgotten which night it was that Lady Pomfret had asked him, and might he be forgiven and asked again? This piece of duplicity shocked and delighted Lydia. Since Julian was the soul of honour his love of secrecy must be founded on deep principles. She respected it, and confided in no one, not even in her sister.

Julian was proud, jealous, and vindictive. Once, piqued by his delay in asking her to dance, Lydia had been provoked into an exhibition of exaggerated friendliness towards a young man whom she had once, in the dead and forgotten past, encouraged. Julian watched her. Coming up some time later he bestowed on her one of his cold, sardonic looks, hoped that she would enjoy a pleasant evening, bowed, and left the house. The next time they met he did not speak to her. Lydia learned that she must never, even in play, offer him the smallest slight. Any attempt at retaliation on her part would always be punished by a blow a hundred times more severe. She learned, too, that it was she who, as she expressed it, had to do all the running: that his pride, no less than his love of secrecy, forbade him when in company from making any move towards her. She thought he was like Swift, who annually issued an 'edict' commanding all ladies to make the first advances.

He was mystifying and provocative. She could not be sure what he thought of her. Admiration and tenderness would be in his eyes; then their expression would change to something hard and even contemptuous, and uneasily she would think, 'He despises me.' One Sunday afternoon he had come upstairs to the schoolroom where Miranda and Lydia were examining a sketch-book lent them by little Grace. The child had an unusual gift for drawing and could make likenesses — more often caricatures — of her friends and relations, which, for one who otherwise revealed little imagination, showed a surprising cleverness. Julian too looked at the sketches, and before Lydia could intervene had turned up one of herself. The drawing showed Lydia seated on a table, her hat at a rakish angle, an impudent smile on her face. It seemed to her excited fancy that

Grace — without knowing what she was doing — had drawn her with the attitude and expression of a courtesan.

Julian had looked at the sketch intently. Then he said, throwing at Lydia one of his hard stares: 'That's you! She has got you exactly. It's a remarkably clever piece of work.'

Lydia laughed, thinking to herself uneasily. 'Oh, he only wants to tease!'

But the memory of his words and looks remained.

Yet he could be humble and tender. Often a word or a look would reveal the gentleness and goodness as well as the painful, almost morbid humility of his nature. Finding her in low spirits one evening he had exerted himself to be unnaturally lively and gay, laughing and joking like a boy; then, imagining that he bored her, he had suddenly flung himself in dejection away. Believing himself to be a bad performer in the ball-room he would hardly ever ask her to dance with him, to Lydia's deep chagrin. She discovered that he kept a photograph of her in his pocket, but he would not, though she asked him, give her one of himself. He did not pay her compliments or use words of endearment; yet his eyes, with their deep and ardent, though guarded look, were a continual intoxicating flattery. One evening he said to her, 'Give me your fan.' She gave it to him; but he did not, as she expected, open it to look at it, but merely held it in silence for some moments at the place where her hand had been.

He was passionate. Beneath the iron restraint he habitually imposed upon himself, she would catch glimpses of the dark insurgent forces caged within. Often he changed colour when he saw her and she noticed that his hand trembled when it touched her own. The strangeness of his character baffled, perplexed, and fascinated her. It was not only her

heart that he had captivated, but her intellect, her imagination, and her soul.

Julian Carr seemed to Lydia to bear a resemblance to all her favourite heroes of romance. He was like Hamlet, like Rochester, like Satan in *Paradise Lost*.

Reading *Hamlet* one day in the schoolroom she came to the passage:

Ham. I did love you once.

Oph. Indeed, my lord, you made me believe it . . .

Ham. I loved you not.

Oph. I was the more deceived.

She put down the book. With concern in her eyes she said to Miranda, 'Can you understand why Hamlet behaved so strangely to Ophelia? Don't you think he was very cruel?'

Miranda looked up from Plato.

'Well,' she said, 'I expect there is a streak of cruelty in many men, particularly when they're in love.'

'But Ophelia hadn't done anything to deserve it!' protested Lydia, 'I don't see why he should have been so hard on her!'

'There wasn't much *in* Ophelia, was there?' said Miranda, resuming Plato.

'No,' admitted Lydia, after a pause, 'perhaps there wasn't.'

One week-end spent near Oxford Lydia encountered Julian's friend, the young poet, Philip King. Immediately she engaged him in conversation which she steered as rapidly as possible to the topic of their common friend, Julian Carr. King's clear-sighted enthusiasm was like wine to Lydia. Yes, he agreed, there was nobody like him — the noblest, the best! Only often so dreadfully down, so infernally sensitive;

with him one was always treading on eggshells. Morbid? Yes, he was morbid. If there were two courses open to him, one easy, agreeable, and generally profitable; the other, hard, painful, and dangerous, he would be sure to choose the latter. 'He worships strength,' said King. What he cared for most was a fine deed in the abstract — 'chalking up a mark on a board,' King described it, 'which nobody read.' He thought that everything was isolated and every one solitary, that there was no unifying principle to bind the world together, but that each must live his own life alone, unknown. 'It's all wrong, of course,' said King, 'but it's what he believes.'

'It sounds noble but dreary,' sighed Lydia, 'and as if he had been dreadfully unhappy!'

'You bet he has!' said King. 'The worse of it is he hates his work. It gives him no scope for glory, and he doesn't care enough about humanity to work for that. What he strives for is some bare ideal —'

Was it partly moral vanity? asked Lydia. Perhaps. And was he, she wondered, an egoist? Well, admitted King, he was so in the way that many great men have been egoists.

'He loves himself,' suggested Lydia, 'with an infinite intellectual love, like Spinoza's God.'

King and Lydia agreed that Julian had a divided soul. One half of him was worldly, practical, and self-seeking; the other half, visionary, romantic, and idealistic. King thought that one half would always be the enemy of the other; that if he attained his ambitions he would despise them, and that he was destined never to be happy.

Did any one really understand him? asked Lydia. King doubted it. He knew Julian as well as anybody, but there were impenetrable walls which even he could not surmount.

'I often think,' said Lydia, a little shyly, 'that he is one of the few people one is convinced has a soul. I don't mean, merely, that he cares so much about what is good, but because of the sense he gives one of feeling most deeply and of being most himself when alone.'

'That's true,' said King, 'and yet I don't know any one who means more to his friends. It is difficult to tell you,' he went on, speaking earnestly, 'what he is to those who know him well.'

'I can guess,' asked Lydia softly.

'And yet which of him,' continued King, smiling, 'is the real Julian? He has so many unexpected sides to his nature, hasn't he? One can't foretell what his future may be. He might suddenly throw the whole thing up and become a monk!'

'Or a millionaire!' laughed Lydia.

'Or an adventurer!'

'Or a Member of Parliament!'

'Or a missionary!'

'Or a king!'

'But whatever he did or was,' added the young man becoming suddenly serious, 'it would always be in obedience to a high motive.'

'You needn't tell me that!' flashed Lydia, her eyes filling. Then she checked herself and changed the subject. It would not do to give herself away.

Before the season was over Lady Pomfret had decided to separate Lydia and Miranda, whose influence over each other she thought bad, sending Lydia to Aunt Edith in Yorkshire and Miranda to Surbiton with Aunt Maud. But three days before they were to leave, Miss Miller gave a party, and Julian Carr invited Lydia, Miranda, and Daniel

Whiteing to dine with him and Humphreys-Drew and go on to Miss Miller's house together.

Something tense in Julian's bearing, a deep still excitement in her own heart, made Lydia feel, as they drew near the house, that a crisis was approaching in her life.

Miss Miller's house was in an old square in the heart of London, an oasis of quiet amidst the city's roar. The party was musical and the guests could, if they wished, enjoy the music from the cool darkness of the gardens.

Julian came up to Lydia and together they strolled away. Other couples passed by them, amongst them Lydia noticed Daniel and Miranda, their heads close together, talking in the low happy tones of lovers.

Julian turned to Lydia and asked gently, 'Are things going hard with you just now?'

'Yes,' said Lydia, with an edge in her voice, 'they are!'

Julian was silent. Then he said gravely, 'One has to remember what one owes . . . it is always a mistake, surely, to lay up stores of bitter memories.'

Lydia felt a sudden surge of anger. *Et tu, Brute!* Was he also against the Light! She made an impatient movement as if to go.

But Julian stayed still.

'Don't you think,' he said, in his slow, grave tone, 'that these things generally come right of themselves? I mean, if there is no inherent obstacle?' He paused, then added with a little break in his voice, 'It's a nice optimistic theory, anyway ——'

Lydia said, 'I hope it's true.'

She did not care to talk then about her troubles. These could wait. The evening must be sacred to herself and Julian and to the third invisible presence between them.

Without speaking he led her away in the darkness to a gate at the garden's far end.

The evening was warm and still. All round them the lime trees shed their sweetness. A row of Chinese lanterns hung like a necklace of glimmering jewels on the dusky bosom of night. Dimly from where they sat came the confused noise of London. Overhead the stars faintly shone.

Together they sat in silence; a silence that slowly gathered depths. As though wrapped in some holy enchantment, Lydia held her breath. The beauty of the night, her nearness to Julian, the music softly pulsing through the dark, bound her in a spell. Her charmed senses, her sweetly aching heart, her mind's vision of life's mystery, of its loveliness and its terror were absorbed in a single, all-embracing emotion. To that moment she would have cried 'Stay,' not merely because it was so fair, but because it had the nature of eternity.

But while Lydia sat imprisoned in enchantment, Julian struggled with an ever-growing agitation. He moved uneasily. A sigh escaped him. Presently he said in a strained voice, 'I wish you'd speak to me!'

As in a dream she answered, 'What is there I could say?'

Silence enveloped them once more. From the house burst forth a stream of melody.

Then in a low voice Julian said, 'Do you leave London with regrets?'

'Yes,' said Lydia.

'Strong regrets?'

'Yes,' she whispered again.

A breeze ruffled the lime trees. The music swelled. All the air seemed full of grave and lovely sound.

At last Julian spoke, seeming to force the words from himself with pain and difficulty.

'Is it better,' he asked, 'to speak or to keep silence?'

She answered, 'Better to speak.'

'Even,' he went on, still more slowly, 'if one were to ask a question the answer to which might only be a prevarication?'

Lydia was silent. What question? What answer? . . .

From the depths of her being she longed to be sincere with him, to find words that should be worthy of the night, of their love. But in her bewilderment her mind groped uneasily over the surface while her heart was anchored fathoms deep below.

She said conversationally, 'What is that they're playing?'

He did not answer her.

Rising to a finale the chords hung in the air, then swelled to a triumphant close. For a little while the air vibrated; then the applause died down and all was still.

Suddenly Julian said with extraordinary sadness, 'Life is too short: it's all too short to be unkind!'

The tone of his voice touched her more deeply than any poetry, more keenly than any music. She looked at the dark head downcast in pain beside her: in a passion of tenderness she longed to lay it against her bosom. She did not doubt that he knew her feeling, even as she knew his. The love that filled her to overflowing must surely, she felt, be visible in the darkness; in the silence he must clearly hear the words that she could not say. She loved him with all the love of which a human being is capable: as a mother loves her child, as a child, its parents, as a wife, her husband, and as a worshipper, his God. Yet she was dumb. She could not 'heave her heart into her throat.' Dumbly she sat, while her soul

cried within her, 'Wait! I am not ready — you are so far above me! Have patience — have pity! Wait!'

But the darkness that bound them together was their enemy; the silence gave no counsel to their distress. He did not hear her tears slow falling; she did not see his eyes were wet. A glance, a touch, would have swept them together, would have opened their hearts, and joined their lives. But they could not break the spell, deep, agonized, that bound them. They could neither move nor speak.

He gave a sigh that rose from his very depths.

'Say one kind word ——' he said.

Her heart beat fast in anguish. She whispered, 'What can I say?'

If he had said to her, 'Do you love me, Lydia?' she would have answered unhesitatingly, 'I love you, Julian, with all my soul.' But he did not ask it: she did not answer. If it was for help he turned to her, she had no help for him.

All the hours when she had stood tongue-tied before her mother, all the moments when she had played truant from life, housed in a dream, all the centuries when captive woman had cowered mute before her master, man, held her speechless now.

The music sounded, ceased, sounded again. Was it an hour that passed or eternity?

Suddenly Julian rose to his feet.

'Come,' he said bitterly, 'let us go. We shall do no better here.'

He walked away in the darkness.

When Lydia reached the house the guests were beginning to thin. Talking to a tall girl at the end of the room stood Julian.

The girl moved away and Lydia willed with all her

strength that he would come over to where she stood. But as he waited there with his arms folded and his head down, she knew that he willed her to come over to him.

She crossed the room and stood before him.

'The party is over,' she said.

He stared her hard in the face.

'I am sorry,' he said as she stood there, waiting — smiling — hoping — 'I am sorry; I was looking forward to another long silence in the garden!'

He turned away and left her. She did not call him back.

That night and for many a long night afterwards Lydia lay steeped in an emotion of which the mingled joy and pain were mastered by an overwhelming regret. She felt that something exquisite and irrevocable had passed between them; that in that hour she had sounded the depths and meaning of her life. But Julian had asked her for a word and she had no word. He had held out to her the keys of Heaven and she, in her helplessness, had let them fall. A word from her would have unlocked the gates, would have set free the Great Prince who lay imprisoned.

It was not spoken.

CHAPTER XVI

MIRANDA'S WEDDING

'It does pay,' said Lydia earnestly to Miranda, one afternoon in the schoolroom, 'it does pay, doesn't it, to be good?'

A heavy burden rested on Lydia's soul: a sense of personal responsibility for the moral character of the entire Universe. If Good predominated, then True Love would triumph, and a will which strove for Good — even though it might occasionally make mistakes — would ultimately attain its reward. But if the Universe were unjust or merely capricious, then anything horrible might happen! Miranda and Daniel might be parted, she and Julian . . . But it was unthinkable. No, the Universe was morally sound. Justice, in the long run, did prevail. All the best philosophers proved this clearly — and Lydia hoped that the run would not be fatiguingly protracted. Rejecting Schopenhauer (only read by ladies' maids) and the other superficial pessimists whose influence had contaminated her youth, Lydia now read only the novels with ethical tendencies and happy endings, and clave to those subconsciously religious thinkers in whom the desire to think well of the universe was strong.

God, whose existence John Stuart Mill, Haeckel, and other rationalists had clearly disposed of, but who did occasionally emerge in moments of panic — as on that memorable occasion not so many years ago when Alfred the canary escaped from his cage at Yeovil Junction and perched singing wantonly on the telegraph wires with the oncoming train due in ten minutes, when naturally one had fallen on

one's knees behind the boxes and prayed — God, or to call Him by His more modern title, the Stream of Tendency, or to be still more up-to-date, the Life Force, was surely on the side of Justice: it did really pay to be good?

Miranda was doubtful.

'Personally,' she said, 'I'm an optimist. But I am afraid you will have to admit a good deal of injustice, not to say indecency, on the part of the Life Force, with respect to many people morally blameless.'

She then went on to cite a number of historical examples, beginning with Joan of Arc and ending with their cousin Alice Stepleton, who had put off her marriage with the man she loved for ten years in order to nurse an invalid father; and then when the father had ultimately died and she had married the man she loved, he had been capsized in a boat the second week of their honeymoon and drowned. It seemed a little difficult after that to maintain that virtue was always rewarded: nor could one shuffle out of it by saying that Alice had a difficult temper and that Joan of Arc had, a great many centuries after her death it was true, been canonized. . . . Nevertheless Lydia clung valiantly to Faith. Had not Kant stated that there was nothing truly good but the Good Will?

When Lydia had forced herself to plead with her mother for the cause of Miranda, Daniel, and True Love, her will had been truly Good. Her courage, though not perhaps that of the lion, had been the more heroic courage of the worm that turns. Yet the result, she was obliged to admit, had not been happy. If goodness were merely a registration of moral chalk marks on the Absolute, the failure of what Lady Pomfret called Lydia's histrionics would have been more bearable. But to Lydia's mind this failure provided a

sufficiently puzzling commentary on the Ethics of Practical Reason. For Lady Pomfret had been merely stirred to fresh wrath; the stock of Miranda and Daniel had rapidly dwindled; and Lydia herself was in black disgrace.

The discovery that Lydia had surreptitiously attempted to find work which her mother judged to be of a most unsuitable kind with an obviously vulgar person by means of a second-rate agency; that her daughter could actually conceive the insane desire to leave her home, had given Lady Pomfret a shock. But more outrageous even than this attempt at independence, or than Lydia's hysterical championship of her sister, was the discovery that Lydia could be her mother's critic. Disloyalty, either in servants or daughters, was the one unpardonable offence.

Anger smouldered all through the summer holidays, blazed, and smouldered again. Mother and daughters were war-scarred and exhausted.

Then in October Judy came home and the atmosphere cleared as if by magic. All that was kindest, warmest, and most attractive in Lady Pomfret seemed to expand in the presence of her favourite daughter. When Judy, radiant in a tiara and a creation of Rosalie's, went with her mother to a Court Ball or a party at Devonshire House, Lady Pomfret's countenance, which had been turned in harshness or gloom to Lydia and Miranda, became immediately soft and bright. Judy, who was never frightened or depressed by her mother and who was listened to by her with affection and respect, was able so materially to improve the prospects and financial position of Mr. Whiteing that Lady Pomfret actually consented, by the end of November, to consider the possibility of an engagement. Sir Caradoc had a private interview, unbeknown to Lady Pomfret, with Daniel's father,

and by the end of December the engagement was in the '*Morning Post*.'

Then at seven one morning Peter had suddenly dropped from the skies, demanding a bath and breakfast and requesting that his wife should be ready in an hour. He had come in a high gig which he drove tandem with his two polo ponies; behind the gig was strapped a Portuguese groom, very small, very black, very frightened.

'We're going a driving tour in the north of England,' Peter had announced at breakfast, 'I'm tired of southern scenery.'

Judy smiled gaily, finished her breakfast quickly, and went upstairs to pack.

'I hate driving,' she confided to Miranda, 'but poor Peter does so love to feel free!'

So off they had gone — in spite of Lady Pomfret's reiterated and agonized protests, in spite of the weather — it was raining heavily and threatened to snow, in spite of the tandem leader who jibbed for half an hour and then dashed off at a frantic bolt down Conyngham Place, the hood of the gig blowing off, and the groom bouncing up to the skies. For Peter was the son of Lord Rendall, whose will had never been crossed.

As Lydia, looking out of the dining-room window, saw the gig whirl out of sight, she heard hard breathing behind her.

'She's got some pluck!' exclaimed William, whose admiration for Judy forced him for the moment to forget his place.

In the drawing-room Lady Pomfret was drying her eyes.

The relationship between herself and her son-in-law had not developed into that affectionate and candid coöperation

for which she had hoped. Gifted and brilliant, Peter could charm whenever he pleased, but although endowed with much imagination, he lacked that animal sympathy which makes for ease in human relationships. When oppressed or opposed he became fidgety and wild. 'You see, darling, he has been so thwarted all his life!' Judy would explain, when Peter had upset Lady Pomfret's carefully laid plans with some sudden bolt. But Judy soon realized the impossibility of justifying to her mother that gipsy strain in her husband that made him so unlike any one else. To Lady Pomfret, in whom a long line of clergymen worked powerfully against the impulse for freedom or beauty, Peter's rebellious instincts seemed to her as reprehensible as his artistic tastes; whilst into that ill-famed country 'Bohemia,' where meals were never properly served and people spent their time playing instead of working, she prayed God that no daughter of hers, least of all the treasured Judy, would ever set foot.

'You see darling, he does so need me!' Judy would exclaim as Peter whirled her away. Gently eluding her mother's protective clutches, and making light of her difficulties, she followed Peter gallantly, with one eye blindfold, wherever he chose to lead.

After Judy's departure gloom and terror once more reigned. Sir Caradoc, Noble, and the kitchen maid went down with influenza. Daniel and Miranda were forced to meet in museums and picture-galleries, where attendants watched them suspiciously, and in tea shops, where their absurdly protracted teas brought down withering glances from peroxide waitresses. Aunt Minnie, it is true, with much furtive winking and grimacing in the drawing-room, had

whispered to Miranda that she and Daniel might enjoy the hospitality of her bed-sitting-room for an afternoon in Notting Hill Square. The lovers had an hour there together, over a gas-stove, among a crowd of wicker-work chairs and tables, a litter of wool-work and two thin cats; drank tea out of cracked cups and saucers left there for their use, and ate a couple of ginger biscuits out of a paper bag. The next day Miranda got a postcard from Aunt Minnie — 'So glad you enjoyed your nice chat, dear — but do you know you left the gas stove on — so extrav!' Daniel wanted to wire back 'Turn it off!' but was restrained by Miranda, who apologized to her aunt, thanked her profusely, and did not trouble her again.

'Oh, how I hate this house,' sighed Lydia, as she stood looking out of the window, her arm round Miranda's waist: 'Don't you long with all your soul to get out of it?'

Miranda said grimly: 'I do.'

Lydia's hopes of a double wedding had been submerged by her more urgent desire to get Miranda's wedding settled.

'Whatever happens, Miranda's happiness must be secured,' she told herself earnestly. 'I must put Miranda first.'

Lydia believed her sister to be the wisest, the most beautiful, and (with one exception) the most perfect being on earth. No one, thought Lydia, ever understood as Miranda understood. A rare and complete sympathy existed between the sisters. Often one knew what the other was thinking without a word being said. When they were parted Lydia would write, 'What is the matter with you?' and by the same post she would get a letter saying, 'I feel so sad; I hope there is nothing wrong.'

Lydia felt that Miranda held the chief place on the stage

and that her own feelings and interests must not obtrude. If her love for Julian were to make her worthier of him, she must subordinate it to the less selfish concern for her sister's good.

She did not doubt now that Julian knew her love for him: she wore her heart on her sleeve and showed her feelings plainly enough. Unhesitatingly she disregarded the warning uttered by Miranda a year ago. 'You should never show what you feel for a man,' her sister had told her. 'I have never let Daniel suspect that I cared.' 'Not even when you know that he is in love with you?' cried Lydia, and Miranda had answered, 'Not even then.' 'But why?' asked Lydia, slightly outraged. 'Because,' Miranda replied, 'there is something of the hunter in man, I suppose; he only prizes what is hard to win.'

Now Lydia felt this feminine caution had something in it that was petty and mean. She could not, she felt, be less than sincere with Julian, scorning to show dissimulation to one who so honoured truth. But the more reckless she became of revealing herself, the more he appeared to be on his guard. Her letters to him, in which she signed herself 'Your Lydia' were thinly disguised love-letters; but although he encouraged her to write to him and showed displeasure if she failed, in his letters to her he never relaxed his own impersonal and formal tone. In company he usually avoided her; and only at rare moments, by stealth, and almost, it seemed, against his will, would he betray himself by a touch or a look. But never again did she feel that sense of nearness to his inmost being which had flooded her soul that July night.

Very rare were the moments when he laid down his guard, and rarely did Lydia treasure them.

One evening, after a small dinner given by Humphreys-Drew, Julian came across to Lydia in the small drawing-room, bringing with him a book of poems by Philip King.

'That's a fine one,' said Julian, as they turned the pages.

'I like this too,' said Lydia.

Leaning back close to each other, their shoulders touching, her hair just brushing his cheek, they were bound together by a force too deep to disturb, too sweet to resist. Slowly, gently, they turned the pages of the book which they did not read; at the last page the book lay still.

After a time Lydia said, with an effort, 'I ought to be going.'

'Not yet,' said Julian.

Presently from the other room there was a movement.

'There's Miss Miller leaving,' said Lydia. 'Oughtn't we to go and say good-bye to her?'

'I suppose we ought,' murmured Julian.

But he did not stir.

Often Lydia felt between them the same mysterious telepathy that she and Miranda knew. She believed she could tell when he thought of her: she was aware of his approach when he was miles away. When he willed her to come to him, instantly, like a needle drawn by a magnet, she was by his side; but when she drew him toward her, he would respond tardily, even angrily, as though he resented her power.

Sometimes his behaviour puzzled and wounded her. One evening, sitting on a sofa, she had beckoned him to come over to her side. But he had not been by her many minutes when he changed colour, got up, and without any definite explanation went away.

Once, as she was talking gaily to him, she saw in his face

an expression she had not seen there before. He watched her with admiration in his eyes, but over them, like a cloud veiling the sun, she saw a strange, dull pain.

'Why does he look at me as though it hurt him?' she wondered. 'Can it be because of me he looks so sad?'

As the winter wore on he behaved more strangely still.

At a party, to which she had looked forward, telling him that she would be there early, he delayed and delayed to come to her.

'Why won't he speak to me?' she thought disconsolately, as the senseless crowd chattered on. 'What have I done this time?'

While she smiled and talked, hardly knowing what she said, she willed him with all her force to come to her. But from the other end of the room as he stood with his back turned to her, she felt his resistance like a rock, hard and stubborn, beat upon by supplicating waves.

At last he turned round and looked. Then he made his way to her side.

'Well?' he asked, looking down at her challengingly, 'What do you make of this crowd?'

'I hate them all!' she cried.

'Why? What's wrong?' he asked, laughing and looking hard at her.

Lydia looked away.

'What's wrong?' he said again.

'To begin with,' she faltered, 'Camilla Herbert wouldn't speak to me —'

'Any one else?' he said.

Lydia made no answer.

He repeated 'Any one else?'

At last she murmured, her cheeks crimsoning, '*You haven't been very kind!*'

As she looked up at him she saw in his eyes an expression that shocked her — a kind of hard and savage pride. Speechlessly she gazed at him, the tears slowly filling her eyes. Then she saw his face change; he hung his head and quickly turned away.

How could he, she wondered, sore and puzzled, take pleasure in giving her pain? She remembered how Miranda had said of Hamlet, 'There's a streak of cruelty in many men.' But she dismissed the comparison as inappropriate. Julian was not like other men. If he were unkind it was because she deserved it. Whatever he did was right.

At Christmas he had gone away mysteriously, leaving Lydia no address. Then on New Year's Day she woke up with a feeling of inexplicable terror which deepened throughout the day. She wondered in anguish whether Miranda and Daniel were threatened? Was anything wrong with Judy? Was Julian ill?

But the feeling passed off and she thought of it no more.

Nearly a month elapsed before she saw Julian again: and when they met she was conscious of a chill, a sense of removal from him, which made her heart heavy. But she comforted herself by the memory of how the winter before Judy's wedding Miranda had felt herself alienated from Daniel. She said to herself: 'It's the price I must pay beforehand. The more I suffer, the nearer it will bring me to him.'

But the thought of her faults and of the heavy price that she owed for them weighed cruelly on her conscience. Could a year's strenuous virtue make up for a life of guilt and laxity? Then there had been Miranda, who had said once ominously enough, 'I don't believe you'll ever marry!'

Aghast, Lydia had said, 'Why not?'

'Because,' said Miranda gravely, 'flirts often don't.'

A flirt! Lydia had never considered herself a flirt. It was only, she explained, a form of charity — not letting people see how dreadfully they bored her. After all one oughtn't to be rude!

But Miranda had dealt her a thrust.

'You did,' she reminded her, 'behave very badly to Mr. Paynton!'

Now the thought of John Paynton loomed back on her conscience. If he had really loved her — if he had felt for her one quarter of the love which she, for instance, felt for Julian — how cruel she must have been! She thought to herself in gloom, 'I shall have to pay for that!'

Miranda's terrible prophecy disturbed her less. For Lydia had made the painful discovery that Miranda was not, as Lydia had always believed her to be, infallible. In the first shock of her happiness, Lydia had attempted to confide in Miranda the miracle of Julian's love. But the confession had been repulsed by a stony silence. Later on, when Miranda's engagement to Daniel had been announced, Lydia again attempted to confide her own hopes. This time Miranda had met the confidence with an incredulity beneath which lurked a curious hostility. Baffled and wounded, Lydia had wondered 'Why should Miranda doubt what I tell her? How can she have been so blind to what has been going on beneath her eyes?' Then, her love for her sister overcoming her pain, she had forced herself to think, 'It is, after all, natural enough. Miranda admires Julian so much and has always a little despised me. She must think it would be unjust that he should care for me; and in this, of course, she is right.'

Nevertheless the knowledge that in the matter most vital to herself she must count on no sympathy from her sister brought with it a sense of mental isolation as painful as it was strange.

Easter that year was early and spring came in cold and wet. Lydia was sent off to pay a dreary visit to her Aunt Maud and Uncle Marmaduke, the parents, now returned from India, of little Grace. For nearly a month she had seen and heard nothing of Julian, nor did she write to him while she was away.

One afternoon, ten days before Miranda's wedding, Lydia met old Hum in the Underground. He came over to where she was sitting, and after a little preliminary conversation said abruptly, 'What do you think of Julian's appointment?'

'What appointment?' asked Lydia, her heart bounding at the mention of his name.

'What, hasn't he told you? He's been given a very important engineering job in Egypt, and will be going out quite soon.'

Lydia's heart stood stone still.

'How long will he be away?' she forced herself to ask.

'Oh, about a year, I should think,' said Hum.

The train stopped. It was Lydia's station. Mechanically she smiled good-bye and got out.

'It's impossible,' she said to herself.

An icy hand clutched her heart, gripping it tighter and tighter till she thought she should faint. It was impossible. He had told her nothing. Old Hum must have made a mistake. But her frozen heart told her that Julian's best friend could not have erred; that Julian's silence was sinister; and that it threatened her very life.

She wrote with trembling fingers asking if the news she had heard that day were true.

He kept her three days waiting for his answer — three days in which she had to go about as usual, helping Miranda to buy her trousseau, writing letters, thanking for wedding presents, making conversation at meals. Then his letter came.

It was short, written in a hurried handwriting; it confirmed the news, said that he was infernally busy, and that he was sailing on the 29th.

Not a word in his letter for Lydia. Not a syllable of affection or regret. Nothing but a few lines which might have been written to his landlady.

Then Lydia said that Julian never could write letters. He must mean to say something before he went away. She wrote, striving not to show her desperation in her letter, asking him when they could meet and say goodbye.

Again he kept her waiting for his answer. When his letter came it was brief. He would see her, he said, at Miranda's wedding, a week hence.

That day Lydia was sent to the dressmaker to see about the last alterations in Miranda's wedding gown. The dressmaker was not Madame Rosalie, but a much more reasonable little woman in Baker Street. Madame Brisbane had taste, though not the indefinable something which marks genius, and she sometimes made mistakes. She had made one now. Miranda's wedding gown of white satin, cut *en princesse*, was, even allowing for the remarkable shrinkage of Miranda's figure during the last year, cut ridiculously small. Miranda could not get inside it, and the whole breadth of white satin was wasted. But now as Lydia

brought the Honiton lace for the bodice, Madame Brisbane held out two white satin dresses for review.

'Good-morning, modam,' she said deferentially. 'Her ladyship thought that as this length was cut she would keep it and give it to you, modam. It will fit you nicely, seeing as your figure is so much slighter, modam. It's lovely satin, modam, and will make you a beautiful gown.'

In this mute tribute of affection Lady Pomfret was trying to make amends for the severity which was still her official attitude to Lydia. It was a surreptitious touch of the old maternal kindness which could not express itself in words.

Lydia looked at the dress speechlessly. Then, to Madame Brisbane's consternation, she suddenly burst into tears.

'I can't take it!' she gasped. 'Tell her ladyship I can't take it! You see it's a wedding dress, and I—I'm not going to be married . . .'

Hurriedly she left the room.

There would be no double wedding now.

Miranda's wedding day dawned radiant and cloudless — a day in which spring seemed to take a bound straight into summer. The sun sparkled on the omnibuses, on the gay hats that suddenly appeared in the streets. In the parks and gardens the flower beds were brilliant with hyacinths and daffodils; the trees were fully clothed in green.

Miranda's wedding was like other weddings, except that as the bride was marrying a poor man, the presents were fewer and less costly, and only a comparatively small number of guests were invited.

The bridesmaids — Lydia and two of Daniel's sisters — wore pretty but inexpensive dresses, and Miranda looked, as a few bolder or less penetrating spirits pointed out to her mother, a beautiful bride.

In the large double drawing-room close to her sister stood her chief bridesmaid, her face wreathed in smiles. No one must guess that anything was the matter. It was Miranda's wedding day.

'He is not coming,' thought Lydia.

Then, just as the guests were beginning to clear, she saw him at the other end of the room. He was frowning and looking about him; then he came up to where Lydia, her face strained in an unnatural smile, was talking to Madame Krasinoff. She saw him look at her; then he stopped short, wheeled away from her, and strode abruptly out of the room.

He had gone.

The wedding, like other weddings, ultimately came to an end, leaving in its wake Aunt Maud and Aunt Minnie, a débris of wedding presents, and an atmosphere of depression and disapproval.

At dinner that night Lady Pomfret, unchecked by the presence of Miranda, fairly let herself go. . . . The diabolical appearance of the bridegroom, the offensive aspect of the best man, the deplorable commonness of the theatrical persons who had insisted on signing the register proved themes for an inexhaustible eloquence. Lydia, sitting silent and unheeded throughout the meal, said that there were some more letters to be written and slipped upstairs to her room.

All that night, hour after hour, as on that other April night just a year ago, Lydia remained awake. Up and down she paced, up and down, staring sightlessly at what lay ahead.

Judy had gone; Miranda had gone. In three days Julian was sailing. He had forsaken her without a word.

CHAPTER XVII

LEFT BEHIND

'WHAT she needs,' said Aunt Maud, knitting vigorously, her head on one side, 'is some definite occupation. Now if she could do something with her hands —'

'Anything that would take her out of herself,' agreed Lady Pomfret, 'but these little self-absorbed creatures are the most difficult of all to help. Sir David told me last year,' she continued, 'that it was a pure case of Nerves.' She pronounced the word with asperity — nerves being another of the things, like pork, actors, and divorcées, that Lady Pomfret never allowed inside her house.

'She might at least,' continued Aunt Maud, 'make more effort to talk. That kind of depressing silence must be so trying for Caradoc and you.'

'Has she tried Higher Thought?' twittered Aunt Edith. 'I have a book with me that I should be only too delighted to lend her — "Will Power and its Miracles." Then there is that beautiful thing of Trine's — "In Tune with the Infinite." Has she read that?'

'I haven't an idea,' said Lady Pomfret without enthusiasm. 'She reads all kinds of stuff.'

'Does she ever see that man now?' whispered Aunt Minnie, taking up a paper-knife and twiddling it about in her hands.

'Put that paper-knife down, please, Minnie,' said Lady Pomfret sharply, 'it belonged to Papa'; adding in a lower voice, 'I fear she may have seen him: he must have returned

to England by now. I was a fool ever to let him set foot inside the house. Though as a matter of fact I believe the whole thing is an hysterical delusion on her part. I have no reason to believe he ever thought twice about her.'

A year had gone by since Miranda's wedding: midsummer had come, bringing with it the annual influx of aunts — Aunt Edith from Yorkshire, Aunt Maud from Surbiton, Aunt Minnie from Notting Hill Square. Aunt Maud, red-haired, and full of energy, was the wife of Uncle Marmaduke, a pale, limp, bilious, completely silent Indian Civil Servant, with long drooping moustaches and a receding chin. Aunt Edith, kindly, untidy, and apologetic (she was a spinster) was the only sister of Sir Caradoc.

They were discussing Lydia, whose condition was causing her mother as much anxiety as irritation. A daughter who not only fails to be bright, pleasant, and conversational, presenting a cheerful front and an attractive appearance to the world, but who remains persistently thin and haggard, who hardly speaks, and whose expression of misery causes visitors to ask fussily 'Is anything wrong with Lydia?' — such a daughter is a cruel affliction to a mother.

Aunt Maud knitted on.

'I suppose at least,' she said, speaking from her superior position on the sofa, 'that she has nothing now to do with Miranda?'

'To the best of my belief,' replied Lady Pomfret, 'she has not been down to Dormer End. But with these cases of obsession and possession one can never tell. How, after his disgraceful behaviour, she can ever bring herself to speak to him again! When I remember the unparalleled affront . . .'

Lady Pomfret was launched on the one topic of which she never grew tired. The scandalous behaviour of Daniel

Whiteing, on which, during the visit of an old school-friend, she had been known to dwell, with only the briefest intervals for sleep, for eight consecutive days, now held the drawing-room. Aunt Maud knitted fiercely. Aunt Minnie clicked her tongue. Lady Pomfret rolled on.

In her bedroom overhead Lydia was pacing up and down. She lived in two hells — the hell of company and the hell of solitude: both were becoming beyond her power to endure. Up and down she paced, as she had paced the night of Miranda's wedding, more than a year ago.

That night had been her first experience of disaster. In all her happy childhood she could remember no calamity more serious than the death of a pet bird, no parting more tragic than her separation from Judy after she had been ill. Her girlhood, it is true, had been often clouded by her mother's illness, and shaken by the storms of her mother's displeasure. There had been deaths too, terrifying at the moment, but of no one near or dear enough to shake the deep security of their family life. Not till a year ago when everything had begun to grow serious, even ominous, had Lydia conceived the possibility that the calamities she read about, that happened to other people, could ever happen to herself.

She had no experience of suffering to guide her. She had never, like Miranda, looked at life bravely, even grimly in the face. Now she saw for the first time the earth cleft open before her — saw the sheer abyss over which, dangling by a frail rope, she dizzily clung.

That rope was her faith in Julian. He loved her. He was good. The memory of his love was too strong, too recent, for her to doubt it. She remembered his looks, his words. He had said to her, as if from his very soul, 'Life is

too short — it's all too short to be unkind.' The man who had so looked, so spoken, could never be faithless or cruel. There must be some explanation, she assured herself, which would account for everything. It might be money, it might be his father, or some incomprehensible masculine principle of honour which forbade him to bind her before he left. Had not Daniel kept Miranda waiting for nearly five years? No, she could not doubt him. She would cling on blindly. She had faith.

The belief that every affliction is sent as an opportunity for moral improvement, that adversity is a divine compliment and suffering a blessing in disguise, that every act of courage or of virtue is of supreme importance not merely to the individual but to God, is a faith that has inspired martyrs and armed heroes, and has lent point and dignity to otherwise colourless and insignificant lives. Lydia sucked all the comfort she could from this innocent megalomania. Her suspense, she believed, was sent as punishment for her transgressions: this ordeal was to prove her worth.

But Lydia, unaccustomed to adversity, fell ill. A doctor was sent for — a hearty, well-set-up man with a breezy bedside manner, who prescribed a tonic.

'You should take up golf!' he suggested. 'Have you tried photography?'

The tonic proving inefficacious, Lady Pomfret took Lydia to see the great Sir David (not Sir Donald in whose fads she had no faith), who sounded Lydia, said, 'Pish! what a pulse!' and sent her to a Sanatorium for three months.

Here Lydia set herself strenuously to the task of self-fortification. 'I have been weak,' she said, 'I must be strong.' Did not Julian worship strength? Had not he said to her in the garden, 'One has to remember what one

owes . . .' She thought, 'I must do the hardest thing possible. I must go home and be reconciled to mother.'

She wrote to her mother briefly, but from her heart, saying that she was sorry for their estrangement, and ending, 'Now that I know that there is no one else to love me, will you not let me come back and try and be something to you?'

Lady Pomfret's reply was a shock to Lydia. It told her that since Lydia had proved herself a disloyal member of her mother's household and since she had professed a desire to work, Lady Pomfret had arranged that Lydia was to spend the autumn and winter at a settlement in Grindingham, where she could do useful work among the poor and learn to live for others. 'It will, I feel sure, be a valuable experience for you,' concluded the letter, 'and should greatly improve your character.'

Lydia thought, 'Why did mother ever say she loved me?' It seemed to her that a child had held out a hand when drowning and that its mother had pushed it away. . . . She did not see the practical wisdom of a separation, after so prolonged a nervous strain on both sides; nor that in unexpectedly turning the tables on her daughter Lady Pomfret offered her work of the kind which Lydia could, without previous training, perform. Least of all did Lydia guess that what had hardened her mother against her most was the fatal confession that her daughter was now bereft.

But one morning, without any reason, Lydia woke up with a feeling of immense and inexplicable joy. All day long this feeling possessed her; and in the evening she saw on the table a letter in Julian's hand.

The letter was not very long and was, like all his letters, impersonal. It told of his voyage in a few closely packed de-

scriptive sentences, and it ended with a cryptically worded suggestion that she should write.

Lydia put the letter next her heart. Then she went upstairs, and sank on her knees.

Faith and love had been supremely justified. Julian had written. The rope held fast.

Armed now with faith and hope, Lydia wrote to her mother accepting the proposal to go to Grindingham. But Lady Pomfret in the meantime had repented, and wrote back saying that she feared Lydia would not be strong enough to do any strenuous work; therefore if she could fulfil a number of vague and formidably worded conditions she might be allowed to come home.

Lydia said, 'I must be strong.'

With superhuman fortitude she waited a week before writing to Julian. Intentionally she made her letter short and cold.

Braced and strengthened to endure everything, she packed her boxes and went home.

... It was an unfortunate moment for the prodigal's return.

Lydia said, 'I must be reconciled to mother!' But she did not realize that reconciliation is a delicate and difficult process requiring infinite patience and much time.

'I must be strong!' thought Lydia, and turned her cheek to the smiter. The smiter struck with a will.

'I must be loving!' she thought, as she turned the other. Then, as she turned it again, she said to herself: 'Why did Mother ever say she loved me! Only hate could make her as unkind as this!'

Lydia was wrong. Lady Pomfret did not hate her daughter. She loved and pitied her. But there does exist in many

strong natures an unconscious desire to persecute the weak, particularly when the weak are utterly at their mercy. Lydia was the visible witness of Lady Pomfret's humiliation and defeat with regard to Daniel Whiteing — a humiliation which not the passage of years, nor grief, nor war, nor even the shadow of death could efface. Moreover Lydia had disgraced herself by falling in love; had deepened that disgrace by falling in love with a man who evidently cared nothing for her — a piece of folly, which, as Lady Pomfret was well aware, exposed a girl to universal contempt. Worst of all, in her dejected condition Lydia threatened to remain for ever on her mother's hands.

'I wish to Heaven she would marry!' wrote Lady Pomfret to Judy, 'but no one would look at her now!'

Lady Pomfret did not hate her daughter. Lydia's low spirits did, indeed, induce that irritation almost invariably occasioned by the sight of suffering inadequately understood. But although forced by temper and policy to maintain towards her daughter an attitude of severity, Lady Pomfret's maternal heart was often inwardly wrung. After a day of extra harshness she would spend a night of remorse. Lydia would find a carefully chosen present on her dressing-table; or a pudding which she had enjoyed in childhood would be ordered for lunch.

But Lydia, blind to these testimonies, would ignore the present, refuse the pudding.

Lady Pomfret, wounded and disappointed, would exclaim, 'There's ingratitude for you!'

Then Lydia, resolute in her efforts to be something to her mother, would ask if she might be allowed to help with the household accounts. But owing to her wandering mind and poor powers of arithmetic, she would make mistake after mistake.

Lady Pomfret, racked with headache, would observe in irritation, 'Why do you profess to wish to help me, when it's evident that you never take the smallest pains!'

Thus the tenderness that each felt, the reconciliation that each desired, was perpetually frustrated.

Lady Pomfret had inherited to an unusual degree her father's talent for preaching. As Lydia sat through sermons of interminable duration, she would think, 'I will bear anything that it is right for me to bear.' But at the slightest aspersion on either Daniel or Miranda, she would get up and leave the room.

This act of passive resistance obliged Lady Pomfret to take refuge in the arts of insinuation and innuendo, and taught Lydia some of Miranda's skill in leaping and dodging dangerous ground. In her mother's company she learned to avoid like the plague the neighbourhood of the fishmonger's, skipped like a mountain goat over the second courses at dinner when taking her mother's orders to the cook, and kept every topic of conversation a hundred miles inland. There was only one fish, her mother would say, making a face of disgust, which she could never tolerate in her house — that abominable little coarse-grained horror they gave you in seaside lodgings with its tail tucked inside its mouth! Hastily Lydia would change the dish to turbot or salmon, or even, if possible, to plovers' eggs: the word 'Whiting' once out, Lady Pomfret would edge nearer and nearer the fatal topic, till the moment came when, with shaking knees, Lydia would rise from her chair.

The other dreaded topic of maternal conversation was Lydia herself. Her guilt was dire. There she was, as Lady Pomfret did not cease to point out, a rapidly fading spinster who had 'failed to marry.' A long procession of Lydias in

various unattractive disguises figured perpetually in her mother's monologues. Now she was Agatha Pauncefort's tiresome daughter, kept for years in a *maison de santé*, costing her mother hundreds of pounds. Now she was the lean and toothy Mary Pendlebury, given up to good works, bad health, social obscurity, and the Isle of Dogs. Now she was Mabel Marchmont with her facial twitch, Edith Kilroy with her keeper, Janet Dodge who had thrown herself out of the window and injured her spine. But most often she was merely Aunt Minnie, that example of forlorn virginity whose ignominious existence was a warning to every unmarried girl. Lydia had once stood up for Aunt Minnie. 'After all,' she had remarked, 'she's a Christian' — an observation characteristic of the bad taste into which Lydia was at this period likely to sink.

In all these cases, Lady Pomfret was careful to point out, the real victim was the mother. 'Naturally,' she said, on hearing that the young man beloved for years by Emily Drake and betrothed to her for a week had been drowned in a boating accident — 'Naturally it is her mother I feel for most!'

One day on learning of the engagement of Agnes Camper to young Thorne-Davidson, Lady Pomfret said to Lydia in a voice of contempt, 'So I suppose you thought Mr. Thorne-Davidson was in love with you!'

Lydia made no reply.

It was true that she had once numbered this never very interesting and now forgotten young man among her admirers. But she knew that it was not the defection of Mr. Thorne-Davidson merely that had prompted her mother's taunt.

Lydia set herself to force into unaccustomed channels a

nature that possessed little capacity for sustained effort or continuous restraint. Laboriously she undertook unsuitable occupations, read books on subjects in which she took no interest, strove to uphold her mother's opinions and to make herself acceptable to her mother's friends.

But Lady Pomfret's friends looked askance at her. The no-longer-young girl who has lost her looks, who is out of health, who cannot get on at home and has conspicuously 'failed to marry' is seldom in universal request. Lydia, who had formerly been beset with invitations, now received none. Mrs. Umphleby held out two fingers, wheezed, 'How de doo: how's mother?' and passed on. Lady Pounder gave her the cut direct. Mrs. Foster, meeting her one day in Bond Street, held out her hands, threw up the whites of her fine eyes and cried, 'Oh, poor, foolish, foolish Lydia! I want to have a long talk with you! Come to tea to-morrow: no, stop — General Laxley's coming and he'll want to hold my hand. Come on Friday — no, that's the Garden Party. Come one day next week. Don't forget!' Lydia thanked her, promised, and abstained. Old Mr. Gibson, it is true, invited her to his annual tea party, but as the card was made out to the Misses Pomfret and his memory was said to have completely failed, Lydia could hardly take this as a compliment to herself. Alone of all the Pomfret circle, Sir Thomas Chudleigh held out a friendly hand.

Lydia asked her father to tell her mother that in deference to Lady Pomfret's wishes she would not go down to Dormer End. From Judy she heard only fitfully. Both her sisters seemed a million miles away.

'Oh, my sisters!' sighed Lydia, 'Judy—Miranda! If only we could be together again! If I could open the schoolroom door and see Miranda under the green lamp reading Plato, or go upstairs and find Judy brushing her hair!'

But the schoolroom had been turned into a boudoir for Lady Pomfret. Judy's writing-table, her clips and worn leather-blotters had gone. In the bookcase Miranda's treasured volumes — Marcus Aurelius, Matthew Arnold, Walter Pater, the ten bound volumes of 'Little Folks' — had been replaced by the Army and Navy Stores Catalogue, 'Who's Who,' and Debrett.

'Oh, my sisters!' sighed Lydia, 'My lovely, merry sisters! Once we used to laugh the whole day long!'

Now no laughter stirred the dullness of the heavy house, through which Lydia would slip silently like a mournful ghost. She thought how often in the old days they would make their father chuckle till the tears streamed out of his eyes; and how even their mother, abandoning her mistrust of humour, would exclaim, her face breaking into involuntary smiles — 'You ridiculous children! How can you be so silly!'

But no laughter now echoed down the staircase. Not a glimmer of a joke shook the dining-room table. Sir Caradoc, the twinkle smoothed out of his eyes, ate his dinner soberly, wiped his moustache seriously, and sighed very slightly as he opened the door for his wife. Thought Lydia, 'Hell is the abode of dullness. Abandon mirth, all ye who enter here.'

Lady Pomfret would send Lydia out for walks with her father. These walks were an ordeal for them both. Sir Caradoc, like many sensitive men, preferred the society of robust and insensitive women. The subtle resemblance between Lydia and her father increased their mutual constraint. Each made an effort to talk politely to the other and each was conscious of the effort the other made. As Lydia's depression deepened her efforts became greater, her silences

more frequent. Her low spirits reacted upon her father and the strain of being together told painfully on them both.

'You should make more effort to chatter and be agreeable to your father,' said Lady Pomfret reprovingly. 'You know how silence depresses him.'

Lydia knew that silence depressed her father, but what passed in his mind and heart she did not know. Father and daughter lived together as strangers, their hearts shut out from each other by the difference of years. Yet Lydia guessed that her father was sometimes unhappy. Sir Caradoc knew that his daughter was lonely and sad. But the knowledge that each suffered could not bring them together: each felt for the other only that pity which is neither comfort nor strength.

Nor was Lydia alone in her failure to penetrate beneath Sir Caradoc's shyness and reserve. 'Your father has no feeling!' Lady Pomfret would exclaim when, exhausted with listening to his wife's anathemas on her sons-in-law, her husband, murmuring some excuse, would leave the room and shut himself up in the study. But no one saw him as he sat there alone with a book lying open on his knee. No one saw the look of sadness on his face as he got up and paced the room. Nor did any one watch when after he had remained a long time in his chair, with his eyes half closed and his head thrown back, he would take a pencil from his pocket and write down some verses in a small and difficult hand.

Years ago when Lady Pomfret had reproved Lydia for reading Haeckel, which, so her mother had averred, would put false and improper notions into the child's head, Sir Caradoc had observed tolerantly that such reading could do her no harm.

'At twenty we all discover the secret of the universe,' he

said to Lydia, 'it's when we grow older that we're not so sure.'

Now when Lydia once asked him if he ever read philosophy, her father replied that it was a taste which he had outgrown. But the day after she had made the painful effort of telling her father of her decision not to visit Miranda at Dormer End, she found a book in her room and inside it a sheet of paper with some verses in her father's hand. The verses were headed 'Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus,' which Lydia, being no Latin scholar, could not translate. But the lines underneath were written in a spirit of grave and philosophic melancholy, which seemed to her beautiful and true. Startled and touched Lydia rushed downstairs and opened the study door.

'Oh father,' she stammered, 'that poem — did you write it? May I have it? I thought it so — so ——'

'I meant it for you,' said her father.

Feeling the tears rush to her eyes Lydia hastily left the room. Outside the door they fell hot and fast.

'I could not thank him,' she cried, as she went upstairs. 'I could not say what I meant. I can never, never say anything to father that I really feel!'

In September Lydia received another letter from Julian, a little longer than the first. Summoning all the fortitude of Sparta to her aid she waited a fortnight before answering it. She made her letter longer, but duller and more priggish, and signed it with both her names.

October passed, and November. No third letter from Julian came.

Lydia thought, 'He must be busy — he may be ill! I will send him one line to find out ——'

The line was acknowledged shortly in a few words which

told her that Julian had been ill, but was better. Feeling that to write to him without further pretext would be a weakness Lydia waited till she should hear from him again.

Before her stretched the winter, interminable, dreary. How could she live through the months, the days, the hours, before he would be home?

Of the comfortable life at Conyngham Place, ordered with exemplary regularity, every detail of each day Lydia knew by heart. The monotony, the punctuality, the rhythm, the chiming clocks that marked the crawling hours, her familiarity with each word uttered by her mother, and with the motive that lay behind each word wore on her spirits like the dropping of water on a stone. Lydia's home was a prison from which every nerve in her body, every fibre of her being were strained in the longing to escape.

... January, February, March... Still Julian did not write. Lydia would wake up in the night cold with fear.

What was the matter? Why had he not written? Round and round her mind revolved over the mystery of his behaviour. If he loved her, why had he left her without speaking? Did he wish to test her, or himself? If he had meant to desert her, he would surely not deliberately have written twice? Yet, why, having written twice, did he not write again?

April came, and May, and now he must be home... Every day she thought, 'He will call!' or 'I shall find a letter from him when I come in!'

June came in hot and radiant; the season was at its height. Dresses were of gossamer, hats rainbow tinted. Lydia chose her clothes with passionate care. She thought, 'I must look my best — I must look my very prettiest when he sees me now!'

All the world was giving and going to parties. To every house where Lydia went her heart beat thick and fast with hope and fear. Would he see her? Would he speak to her?

But he came to none.

The strain of waiting burned her with a red hot anguish: every nerve quivered, her soul seemed flayed alive. 'I cannot bear it!' she moaned as she paced her room in torment. 'God have pity on me — why does he not write to me — why does he make no sign?'

July brought with it the annual influx of aunts. Aunt Edith said kindly, 'Let me come into your room and have a nice quiet chat together, dear.' But Lydia only smiled uneasily and fled away.

In desperation Lydia sought Miss Miller and told her everything.

In her austere furnished, quiet room, looking over the garden, Miss Miller listened gravely, holding Lydia's hand.

Yes, she said, she had seen Julian since his return, but only once and not for long.

Lydia asked, had he spoken of her ever?

'Ah no,' Miss Miller answered her, 'He would confide in no one. He is secret as the grave.'

Miss Miller was kind. She was patient and thoughtful.

'He has some deep scheme,' she said. She neither counselled hope nor did she discourage it. Once she said, as if from knowledge, 'This has not been easy for him. He has had, you may be sure, a hard struggle with himself.'

Ah yes, Lydia could believe it had not been easy. Did he not always choose to do what was most hard? She thought, 'Only the best of men could be so cruel. He is killing me to save his soul!'

As Lydia rose to go Miss Miller said gravely, 'This is your

first trouble and to you it may seem unendurable. But although it can be no comfort to say so now, you will get over it. I believe that there is nothing so hard that it cannot be supported with courage. You will be given strength to bear what you may have to bear.'

As Lydia looked at the kind face, which seemed to her pale and worn, she thought, 'She does not know! Miss Miller has lost her parents, her sister, and a brother; she may even have loved and lost her lover as well. But she cannot know what I should feel if I were to lose Julian. No one who felt as I do could think I could bear that!'

Before Lydia left Miss Miller promised that she would arrange a meeting with Julian. She would give a little dinner-party and they should both be there. •

... Dressed in her prettiest dress, radiant and smiling, Lydia came to Miss Miller's room the night of the party, her head held high. Smilingly she shook hands with Mr. and Mrs. Todman. Smilingly she took Julian's hand.

As Lydia took his hand in hers her heart went sick and faint. For Julian's eyes were on the ground, his cheeks were paper-white. . . .

Brightly she said to Miss Miller, 'You know the usual excuse! One starts late thinking one can do it easily in a taxi-metre cab, and then one finds that there are only five in working order in the whole of London and that they are all engaged!'

To herself she said, 'This is a nightmare. How can I live through it? Julian cannot look me in the face . . . '

The Todmans, a dull couple blessed with a convenient volubility, held the dinner-table with an account of their recent tour of the United States. Lydia uttered polite interjections, made an occasional joke. Once in a general laugh

she looked across at Julian. His eyes, as though dragged by main force from the table, met hers in a blank stare.

After dinner Miss Miller said, 'Take Miss Pomfret into the garden, Julian!'

But it was a different garden from that in which they had sat two years ago. No chain of softly glimmering Chinese lanterns lit the summer dusk. No sound of music came from the rooms above.

Two strangers paced formally up and down making polite conversation. Up and down they paced, a wall of ice between them.

Miss Pomfret hoped that Mr. Carr had enjoyed his travels?

Mr. Carr replied that it had been a most interesting experience.

Miss Pomfret inquired how long Mr. Carr had been back?

Mr. Carr said about six weeks.

Then a stifled voice which was not quite Mr. Carr's added bitterly, 'It was wonderful to have such a warm welcome after a whole year's exile! So much bunting! So many flags out!'

And Lydia frozenly wondered, 'Is that meant for me?'

Miss Pomfret asked lightly why it was she could never get on with Mrs. Todman? What did he think it was that was wrong with her?

Mr. Carr, with a side glance in her direction, answered in a hard voice that sounded curiously familiar, 'Isn't what is wrong merely the absence of anything real?'

And Lydia knew that it was meant for her.

Then Miss Pomfret asked if he had heard any music? Mr. Carr inquired if she had seen any of the summer exhibitions? Miss Pomfret asked what he had thought of the

amazing marriage of Lord Podbury to Lady Pounder, announced six months ago? With a laugh that was almost Lydia's, she said, 'When I heard of it I nearly wired to you!'

And a voice that sounded strangely like Julian's answered with a little break in it, 'I wish you had!'

Then the two strangers resumed their polite conversation, a wall of ice between them. Till finally Miss Pomfret said that it was time she was going, and Mr. Carr said 'Good-bye.'

As Lydia drove home she remembered Miss Beaver of whose death in a hospital from cancer she had heard two days ago. Now she thought with a sick and intolerable envy that Miss Beaver had all the luck. . . . There was no hope. It was ended. Julian had thrown her over.

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But even then she could not believe it.

CHAPTER XVIII

ESCAPE

SHE could not believe it.

In every one, until age or disappointment has killed it, springs the eternal, life-sustaining lie. Hope alone gives life to hopeless causes; by hope alone nations armed in a death struggle endure its torture, waste, and irredeemable wrong. Lydia looked into her heart and found at its very bottom a tiny spark of hope. And as an overpowered army clings to the last to the hope of victory, as a mother by the bedside of a dying child clings to the hope of its recovery, so Lydia clung to the hope that Julian would return to her — not from courage, but from necessity; not from strength, but from the very extremity of her despair.

But hope though it may support life cannot nourish it, particularly when it is nearly at an end. Lydia sank into the condition known as melancholia. It is a nausea of the soul. Life, and every reminder of life filled her with sickness; she could not bear to look at a face, she could not speak. She could hardly dress herself, or hold a pen, or form the letters of the simplest word. To sit through a meal became an impossibility. She could hear no sound, she could see no sight that did not cause her pain. If she slunk out of the house dreading always that she would be intercepted, she had nothing to do, nowhere to go. If she stayed in her room she could only pace its short length up and down, or lie on her bed trying to bring her mind to the emptiness of death.

‘Oh,’ she thought, ‘to be dead, dead, dead. Not to think, not to feel, not to wake in the morning — never, never to

wake again!' The thought of stones, cold hard stones, without life or movement, was the only comfort she could find. Her worst sufferings were roused by any reminder of love or beauty. The sound of music was like a knife turned excruciatingly in her heart. Once she came upon a pair of lovers kissing tenderly . . . No anguish, she thought, can be worse than this.

There are limits to the capacity for endurance. Lydia had reached hers. One morning she went to her mother's bedroom and knocked at the door.

Lady Pomfret was seated at her dressing-table looking at herself in the glass. The face it reflected was pale and drawn. On it were the visible marks of sleepless nights, of physical suffering, and of grief. For Lady Pomfret was both a sick and an unhappy woman. Of her three daughters, the one she loved best was far away, married to a man whom Lady Pomfret feared and distrusted, out of her mother's care at a time when she would need her most. Her youngest daughter was estranged by her marriage with a man whom Lady Pomfret looked upon as her enemy. The daughter who remained was not only unmarried but seemed likely to remain so for ever, unhappy, useless, a wreck. But beneath these anxieties lurked a more personal sorrow. Not one of her children, Lady Pomfret felt, really trusted her. She who had been all in all to them when they were little, she who had borne them, nursed them, loved and tended them, spent her thoughts and her care on them was now to them as naught! Was there any lot sadder, thought Lady Pomfret, as she gazed in bitterness at the worn face in the looking-glass, than that of a mother! To care so much, to wish to help, to know how to help, and yet to have that care and help thrust aside!

At this moment Lydia knocked at the door.

'Come in!' said Lady Pomfret.

Lydia came in.

'Please, Mother,' she said in a faint voice, 'if you don't mind, I think I should like to go away —'

Lady Pomfret looked at Lydia's face and saw in it something that made her put down her looking-glass and hold out her arms.

She said, 'What is the matter, my poor darling? Tell your old mother!'

In an instant all the bitterness had left her countenance. She became kind and strong. She held Lydia in her arms and kissed her closely — all her sins were forgiven in a flood of passionate, protective, maternal love. Lydia was once again the baby she had borne, had nursed, had carried snuggled up in her arms; she was the merry little long-haired girl who cried when she was scolded; the young woman growing up difficult, wayward, elusive, then discontented and rebellious — yet always her weak one, needing help, needing correction, her own dear child. Her motherly heart yearned for Lydia's confidence. Had she not always been as a tower of strength to children, husband, friends? There were many, so many, who leaned on her, trusted her. Why did her child shut her out?

With tears in her eyes she said again, 'Tell your old mother!'

In dumb anguish Lydia pressed her cheek against her mother's bosom. She felt its kindness, its strength. In the utter weariness of her misery she longed to tell her mother everything. She thought, 'Now, if ever, Mother and I could be reconciled.'

But it was impossible, impossible. She could not betray

him. Not for the world, not if she were to die for it, could she bring herself to utter Julian's name.

The moment passed.

Marthe came in with a hot water can. Lady Pomfret dried her eyes, became practical. She said: 'What you need is six weeks of bracing air. I will write to-night to that excellent place in the Pilvern Hills recommended by Sir David. There's Agnes Beesley, that capital creature, just close by. Her stimulating society will be the very thing for you. And stay — the Beaton-Belvoirs are only a few miles away, Amabel is a most unselfish devoted daughter. ... You must take my cloak. And look, Marthe, in that right-hand top drawer and see if you can't find three new pairs of gloves for Miss Lydia — no, goose — the top one. And I'll get Sir David's prescription made up at once.'

Lydia went away. But the bracing air of the Pilvern Hills brought no improvement, nor could Sir David's prescription, nor the stimulating society of Agnes Beesley, nor the friendly advances of the unselfish Amabel Beaton-Belvoir, relieve the sick anguish of Lydia's soul. She thought, 'I must work: I must find work. There is no other way of keeping this torture at bay.'

Then she thought of the Women's Settlement at Grindingham where, a year ago, her mother had wished her to go. She wrote to the Principal and told her that if there were room she would like to come and begin work at once.

Before she left Lydia stole off to Miranda, to see the baby daughter Elizabeth who had just been born. She spent a day at Dormer's End, in the old red house about which there hung always a haunting atmosphere of peace. It was an isle in the sea of her misery. Miranda loved her house, which was beautiful with the gracious and gentle beauty of

an old building which has always sheltered happy people; she loved its stillness, its air of leisure, its long low rooms to which clung a sweet, fresh, indefinable smell. She loved her garden where she and Daniel would sit on summer evenings, watching the sunset, smelling the night-scented stock, listening to the birds. She loved her husband, she loved her baby, she had the life of which she had dreamed. She told Lydia that Judy was expecting a baby, and Lydia thought with a little thrill, 'A new generation has come into the world!'

She told Lydia, too, a piece of news that faintly dismayed her. One of her neighbours was a sister of John Paynton's. 'Poor John,' as his sister called him, had never married, and sometimes she thought he never would. Then Miranda gave her a shock. Avoiding her sister's eye, she said evasively, 'I suppose you couldn't marry him now?'

Lydia stared at her sister in horror. What was she thinking of? Had she gone mad?

Lydia had hoped that John had married long ago and that this sin might be erased from her conscience. She thought how completely she had forgotten him — to what another life that episode belonged!

In October, Lydia went to Grindingham. The settlement was something like a convent, something like a reformatory. Situated in sordid surroundings, amid the perpetual atmosphere of poor people, it was depressing: yet with its ordered routine and spirit of impersonal service, it gave Lydia the mental rest and moral support she craved. As she unpacked her boxes she thought with a feeling of relief, 'I have escaped from prison. I will never go back to Conyngham Place!'

She remembered again what Julian had said to her, 'My

complaint against most women is that they have had no education and have never worked.'

Never in Lydia's childhood or girlhood had she set herself strenuously to do anything she did not like. Her lessons she had skipped through in a perfunctory manner, avoiding the subjects she had no taste for, and never working for long even at those in which she excelled. Now she said to herself: 'I will shirk nothing. I will work my hardest. I will go on working until I drop.'

The Settlement was no place for idlers. Most of the workers were hard-headed, able-bodied women who had worked more or less continuously all their lives. Lydia found that her inexperience and muddle-headedness left her far behind them, and that her frequent mistakes obliged her to work longer than any one else. But when her ears buzzed or her eyes swam she would say to herself, 'Julian would despise me if I gave up.'

All the courage that she had sprang from her love of Julian. At night, throwing off the burdens of the day with an ecstasy of relief, she would turn in the darkness to the comfort of imagined kindness, to the support of invisible arms. The goodness and nobility she knew was his she leaned on. It was more than the love of man she felt for him, it was the love of God.

Endowed with that capacity for self-abasement, for transforming human failings into supernatural virtues, which distinguishes the true devotee, Lydia refused to admit to Julian any share of blame for what had passed. All the fault was hers. Julian had tried her and found her wanting. He had scorned her for that 'absence of anything real,' more fatal than any positive defect. She had begged for his friendship, but how had she shown herself capable of being

his friend? What tastes had they in common, what sympathies had they shared? Had he not looked in her face, as Hamlet had looked in the face of Ophelia, and seen there nothing? He has asked her for a flower; she had given him a weed. He had asked for a word; she had been dumb. Slowly, reluctantly, the conviction was forced upon her that the love she bore Julian had no resemblance to the emotion he felt for her: that while she worshipped him as her highest good he had derived from her nothing but a passionate physical attraction which he had resisted with all his strength. Every man, she thought, has two soul faces: one he turns to the world, the other to the woman who loves him most. Julian had turned to her, as Hamlet to Ophelia, a face that he would have been ashamed to turn to a friend.

These reflections brought both pain and consolation. For if they diminished Julian's perfection they also lessened the distance between herself and him. What could she do now, she wondered anxiously, to bring them nearer still? How could she strike the imagination of one who so admired *panache*? Oh, she thought, if she could paint a picture, write a poem, play the piano brilliantly, or perform some conspicuous or heroic deed! How easy she felt it now to risk her life. To those who long for death heroism is cheap.

But no opportunity presented itself more spectacular than a dreary devotion to duty. She could console herself by reflecting that he had always honoured that. She thought, 'He threw me over because I was worthless: he will love me again if I am good.'

But Lydia's love, although her mainstay and her religion, was still, she knew, imperfect. Spinoza had commanded: 'Love God: but do not desire that God should love you in return.'

This counsel she believed to be impossible. She could not struggle endlessly; she could not hold fast to the hero in her soul if from her life were taken its highest hope. If that hope must perish she herself had sworn to die.

Life as she beheld it now was unendurable. The fate that her mother had held over her years ago had come to pass. No one loved her, no one needed her. She had no capacity for earning her living, no money of her own. She could not stay on at Grindingham doing work that she hated; she would never go back to Conyngham Place. She had been brought up to marry and she had failed to marry. What was to be her end?

Clearly enough she saw her end, foreshadowed by her mother in so many lengthy talks. There she was in that long procession of unmarried daughters held up relentlessly before her eyes: one of the failures, one of the outcasts, despised and rejected of men; elderly Cinderellas without fairy-godmothers, the butts of comedy, the scorn of youth. Clearly she watched that long and dismal procession; clearly enough she saw them now.

The unmarried daughter living on at home of which she had grown sick and weary, which has grown sick and weary of her. No longer young but treated as a child by her mother. 'Where are you going?' every time she leaves the room. Always expected to do things for others: 'You're not married — you've nothing to do!' Dropping out of festivities, and when invited at all, only at the last moment. 'You're so good-natured, dear, I'm sure you won't mind talking to old Mrs. Buncombe —' 'I've been obliged to give you Sir Joseph's deaf ear.' 'You won't mind spending a quiet evening with a book, dear? We're all going off to Lady Dashington's dance.' . . . The unmarried daughter,

fought shy of by young men — ‘Thanks, old chap — but a bit long in the tooth!’ Snubbed, overlooked, despised: ‘We can’t ask people like that to parties — it’s so depressing for the men.’

The unmarried daughter who has gone to the Good: ‘Oh! she’s at some committee or other, I suppose. Wears herself out with these wretched poor people — she’s no use whatever to any one at home!’

The unmarried daughter tied to an invalid mother: ‘Won’t you come abroad with us — just a fortnight in September? You look fagged out!’ ‘Oh, thanks, but you see I can’t leave mother.’ ‘Do look in to-night: we’ve some really good music.’ ‘I should love to, but I must read to mother.’

The unmarried daughter who longs for children: ‘Oh, let me take him — the angel — the pet!’ Holding him closely, kissing tenderly — all warm and naked, out of his bath. ‘Look at his dimples, his adorable toes!’ ‘Give him back now, dear — no, baby, no crying — here, take him, nurse.’

The unmarried daughter who takes to pet dogs: ‘She’s perfectly ridiculous about that silly little animal — makes as much fuss about him as if he were a child!’

The victim of hypochondria: ‘Oh, she spends her life going to one quack doctor or another, and there’s nothing in the world the matter with her except nerves!’

The victim of delusions: ‘My dear, that man follows me about everywhere! Well, I’m not mistaken about the other — didn’t you see how he stared?’

The unmarried daughter who has buried both parents and lives in hotels abroad: ‘Those depressing old pussies! Why were convents abolished? They did keep most of them out of the way!’

Left with no money, no health, and no training: 'Oh, she can read to old ladies or play chess to lose with old gentlemen: that's about all she's fit for!'

Just keeping alive: 'Oh, my dear, she's a hundred a year, she can't starve!'

Growing lonelier and lonelier: 'For goodness sake, don't let her in, Johnson — if she comes to tea she stays all night!'

More and more unattractive: 'In the Middle Ages, she'd have been burned as a witch!'

Dying slowly of cancer: 'My one comfort is I leave no one behind who will care' . . .

Lydia was set to work at the care of school children. At her first medical inspection the sight of hundreds of under-fed, misshapen, insufficiently washed little bodies filled her with misery. Her eyes kept filling with tears. The enormous mass of poverty overwhelmed her. Later on she was able to pick out a few cases in which she took an especial interest. Nearly all of these took a tragic turn.

There was the family of Masters — eight children, another coming, and the father out of work. There was Mrs. Reade ill with a bad attack of peritonitis, which Lydia augmented by opening, with the best intentions, a window just over her head. Unused to fresh air, Mrs. Reade caught a fresh chill and was laid up for six weeks. Lydia came to see her every day and listened patiently to her domestic complaints. Then Mr. Gammon, a builder, apparently in the best of health, went to have a back tooth out with gas and died of heart failure. When Lydia came to see poor Mrs. Gammon, frantic with grief, rocking herself to and fro, she thought, 'Life can be like this.' But her hardest trial was the Workhouse Infirmary, which she visited once a week. Talking to the sick men was to Lydia an effort which her

pity for their sufferings made harder. Encouraging them to talk about themselves, she increased their misery, which in turn reacted on her. There was young Baker, discharged three months ago, and now returned with a permanently sore throat and a frightened look on his face; old Chard who had been an actor and now, sinking slowly, still babbled vain-gloriously about his fame. One of the men complained that a young chap in the ward had kept them all awake by hollering out all night. He was dying, he said irritably; no use making a noise about that . . . Lydia was haunted by the sight of an elderly man who paced up and down the leads in silence, shunning everybody, hiding some grinding pain, some grisly fear. She dared not speak to him, but she thought, 'This horror, too, is life.'

One case in particular made a peculiarly painful impression on her.

Mrs. Simmonds, a gentle, sad-faced widow, working at a factory, had lost her two eldest boys, she told Lydia, soon after their father died. All she had left now was little Johnny — a delicate little boy six years old, with a pretty, peaky face and large dark eyes. 'I feel, miss, as how I couldn't go on, if it weren't for Johnny,' she told Lydia.

While Mrs. Simmonds worked, Johnny was left in charge of a neighbour. Perhaps the neighbour, burdened with children of her own, could not give him all the care he needed; perhaps little Johnny's constitution — his father had died of tuberculosis — was never likely to be strong. At all events he caught a chill; it settled on his lungs and he was taken to the hospital. There Lydia came, and saw, with a fainting heart, his mother sitting by little Johnny's side, white and drawn. 'He must get better!' she thought. 'He must! He is all that poor woman has . . .' She spent all her

available money on delicacies for him. 'He may pull through yet,' said the doctor. 'There's just a chance, of course, poor little chap.' Lydia thought, 'He can't die! The universe could never be as cruel as that!' But in spite of Lydia's challenge to the Universe, in spite of the grapes, the doctor's skill, his mother's agony, little Johnny died.

The other workers went about their business in a cheerful and practical spirit. One of them, a bright-faced, loud-voiced, elderly woman, spoke to Lydia kindly, the day of Johnny's death. 'You know, my dear, it doesn't do to worry too much about your cases. One does what one can — of course it's precious little — but it's no use taking what one can't do too much to heart!'

Lydia thanked her. But the advice was useless. She could not resist the infection of other people's suffering: she could not help identifying herself with her cases. Her naturally sympathetic nature, weakened and depressed, felt the pains of others as heavily as though they were her own.

That night she opened wide her window and looked out at the stars. Orion rose bright before her and the whole heavens, bare of clouds, shone forth in vast cold splendour.

Lydia thought, 'Can the universe really be indifferent? Is there no meaning, no pattern to our lives? I must believe that some spirit of mercy works in all this senseless suffering and that an ultimate harmony reconciles what we know with what we hope!'

But the stars shone on, changeless, timeless, unknown, illimitably remote. A sense of the awfulness of space overwhelmed her. Each star a sun, each sun a system, each system a universe; beyond all, space — empty, vast, fathomless space, without end. The earth shrank to a speck of dust; human life, good, evil, pain, happiness, man's im-

mortal soul were lost. No mind could guess, no compass span the measure of the dreadful infinite.

At last with a shiver Lydia turned from the window: she shut the immensities out.

The warmth and light of the room restored her. Slowly beneath her feet the earth outstretched again. From a drawer she took a packet of Julian's letters and held them in her hand.

She said to herself, 'Love is the only earthly reality: the one thing that gives meaning to our lives. If I hold fast to love there will be something here to guide me. The universe will not seem terrible or blind.'

She thought of Julian's courage, his goodness, of the depths of his lonely soul; of the tried spirit that could envisage death without flinching, the thoughts that wandered through eternity unafraid.

She knew that if she and Julian were united, she would find little ease or sympathy; perhaps much suffering. Yet she hoped from the reconciliation of their opposite natures there might spring a deeper understanding, a higher courage, that she might gain a difficult blessedness.

Wrapped in this hope, in a boundless love which exalted her far beyond pain or fear, in a peace that seemed to her heavenly, she sank at last to sleep.

The day afterwards she decided to spend an afternoon away from the Settlement. Taking a book with her for company she went on a tram as far as the People's Park.

It was a mild November day. The afternoon sun turned to gold the few fading leaves of the elm trees and cast a soft radiance over the old people sitting on the benches and the children playing on the grass. Lydia made her way to a secluded path and sat down on an empty bench. Indifferent

to nature and humanity, she looked at nothing. Two sparrows, their beady eyes fixed expectantly on her, hopped towards her. She ignored them. Taking the book from her pocket she began to read.

There were very few poems, thought Lydia, that did justice to the passion of love. Here was one.

'There pass the careless people
That call their souls their own;
Here by the road I loiter,
How idle and alone.'

'Ah, past the plunge of plummet,
In seas I cannot sound,
My heart and soul and senses,
World without end, are drowned.'

'His folly has not fellow
Beneath the blue of day
That gives to man or woman
His heart and soul away.'

'There flowers no balm to sain him
From east of earth to west
That's lost for everlasting
The heart out of his breast.'

'Here by the labouring highway
With empty hands I stroll:
Sea-deep, till doomsday morning,
Lie lost my heart and soul.'

Such a poem, thought Lydia, might have been written by a woman. Man, as the nobler creature, inspired a profounder passion, but suffered less. Something of himself — mind, will, ambition — he kept back. Man's love was of the valley; woman's was of the sea.

Lydia shut her book.

Before her a strolling couple halted for a moment, then sat down on a bench close by. They were a young man and woman of the artisan class, obviously lovers. Something about the man's look, his square jaw, the forward bend of his head, reminded Lydia of Julian. He leaned towards the young woman, talking to her earnestly. She, sitting silent, her pale, pointed face hung down, looked away. Suddenly he seized both her hands in his and drew her towards him. The young woman resisted no longer and Lydia saw their faces meet in a long embrace.

She sprang to her feet and walked hurriedly away.

All the passion in her nature flamed with a fierce, intolerable envy. Why should she be denied a happiness so natural, so common, so near? She could bear this aching misery no longer . . . She would write to Julian that night.

In her letter, impulsively, desperately, she laid bare her heart.

As Lydia took her letter to the pillar box she seemed to feel an unseen hand laid on her arm. She paused, with her letter in the slit of the box, and said to herself: 'What is the matter?'

A warning voice seemed to whisper, 'Don't post it!'

Lydia wavered; then said, 'Why not?' — and in the letter went.

A week later, as she came in cold and tired after a medical inspection, she saw, among the letters in the hall, one that made her heart stand still.

She went upstairs and with trembling fingers tore open the envelope.

When Lydia had read the letter she said, 'I don't know what this means' . . .

Yet its meaning was plain enough. It told her, without equivocation, that Julian had cast her off for ever.

Lydia put the letter down.

She said, 'I can't take this in.'

Before her loomed something monstrous, rock-like, implacable.

She said, 'I shall have to get this inside me. I shall have to force this stone, bit by bit, inside my heart. I shall have to keep it there until I die.'

She said again, 'This is a stone sent by Julian to kill me.'

Quietly she dropped it into the fire.

That evening she went to the chemist. She had been having bad neuralgia, she told him, and could not sleep. Could he give her an opiate?

The chemist said he could. Three drops of this would relieve her. Not more, he cautioned: it was nasty stuff to play about with.

'How much,' asked Lydia carelessly, 'would be a fatal dose?'

The chemist told her.

She paid for the bottle and took it away.

The knowledge that in her hand lay the remedy for all her anguish; that at any moment that she chose she could escape filled her with an immeasurable relief. As a lost and terrified child turns to its mother's arms, as a shipwrecked castaway sees at last the familiar and beloved shores of home, so Lydia gazed at the bottle in her hand.

'That ought to be enough,' she said that night, as she poured out half the contents into a glass.

She raised the glass to her lips.

But a tiny whisper which she could scarcely hear counselled, 'Think!'

Lydia thought.

She thought of her sisters — Judy, Miranda. Both were happily married. They would get over it. She thought of her father and mother. The memory of her kind, gentle father, who had never in his life said a harsh word to her, made her wince.

'But it can't be helped,' she said. 'If he knew what it meant to me he would be glad.'

Then she thought of Julian.

Julian had killed her.

The tiny voice whispered, 'He will know why you have done it.'

Lydia answered, 'He won't care.'

The voice whispered, 'He will.'

'Serve him right . . .' she answered faintly.

But again the voice whispered, 'Don't you think he has suffered enough? Didn't you pray to make him happy? Can you give him this to bear?'

Slowly the dreadful conviction that she could not do it, that because she loved Julian she must spare him the consequences of what he had done to her, swept over her like a black and bitter flood. For three years she had schooled her conscience; she had striven for fortitude, magnanimity, disinterested love. Now these virtues, like vices, held her fast.

A horror of life and the desire to leave it do not necessarily imply a lapse of sanity. Lydia's conviction that her existence was shipwrecked, that it would be better for her to take her life then while she had the courage and the desire to take it, rather than to wait till, feeble and frightened, death took it from her in old age, was as rational as any that she would be called upon to form.

Julian had said that life was all too short . . . She came of a long-lived stock and might easily live another fifty or sixty years. Life with its endless misery, its intolerable length of hopeless days, stretched before her, grey, relentless, interminable . . . Here, at hand, was a chance of escape.

She could not take it.

CHAPTER XIX

ANOTHER WEDDING

ON a winter morning three years later, Lady Pomfret was sitting before a large coal fire in the drawing-room of Conyngham Place. Beside her sat her sister-in-law, Maud Pomfret, her knitting in her lap. Both women, by nature kind-hearted and practical, were engaged in a task they enjoyed. Catalogues and milliners' advertisements strewed the sofa.

'She can't do better,' said Lady Pomfret, taking up her pencil, 'than go to Félice's for her stays. It's true she charged a preposterous price for mending my last pair; however ——'

'What about petticoat bodices?' asked Aunt Maud, checking her sister-in-law's list. 'I see you've got down two dozen. Need she get them all there?'

'Certainly;' said Lady Pomfret decidedly. 'Félice's work is exquisite. I shall put all the *lingerie* in her hands.'

'Pet. bod. 2 Doz.,' copied down Aunt Maud in her less elegant but more legible high-school handwriting.

'After all,' continued Lady Pomfret, 'she's marrying a rich man. She must go to him decently turned out. Dear John... Have you got the chemises?... I was so much touched by the way he went over all Papa's investments for me. A heart of pure gold! Why the dear goose couldn't have made up her mind to marry him years ago!'

'Oh, well!' said Aunt Maud, 'I suppose she had to sow her wild oats. Now what about night-gowns?'

Lydia's engagement to John Paynton had turned Conyng-

ham Place into an abode of love and joy. All day long the postman kept knocking and ringing. William in a new suit, Noble in a new set of teeth, carried tray-loads of parcels upstairs. Sir Caradoc's face had lost the look of sadness that sat on it when he was alone; Lady Pomfret ordered a new dining-room carpet and promised Lydia's bed to Aunt Maud. Miranda's bedroom was turned into a nursery for Judy's children; for Peter was stationed at Aldershot, and while he and Judy house-hunted the two beloved grandchildren stayed at Conyngham Place.

Lady Pomfret had now fulfilled that duty which good mothers owe to society and possibly to God. Proudly she could look in the faces of her contemporaries who had married off all their daughters; still more proudly in the faces of those who had not. No longer had that awkward presence, that poorly veiled skeleton, to be explained away — Oh, she's absorbed in the Suffrage — or Bookbinding; or — She's taken up Christian Science — or Sour Milk; or — We're sending her to try India this year . . . No longer were two parents bowed down in shame by the spectacle of an ageing unmarried daughter left on their hands.

Now was Lady Pomfret's satisfaction merely negative. Of all the young men so long cultivated by her, John Paynton most successfully fulfilled her ideal of what a son-in-law should be. Upright, conscientious, a member of Parliament, he was a church-goer; he had been educated at Harrow and Oxford; he was interested in finance and food. Patiently he would listen to long conversations about servants and illnesses, helpfully he would give advice on stocks and shares. He abhorred psychological novels, problem plays, and what Lady Pomfret called Filth. Above all, he had good principles and high standards. When he travelled obsequious

guards flung open doors of reserved compartments; tradesmen served him with nothing but the best. For every reason Lady Pomfret could congratulate herself; her latest son-in-law was Gold all through.

A sound of pattering footsteps and of soft piping voices was heard outside. The door opened and a little boy and girl, Judy, and Sir Caradoc came into the room.

Sir Caradoc had aged. His hair was now grizzled, his quick light step had grown slower, his shoulders stooped. Judy too had changed. With motherhood, her beauty had gained a new depth and dignity, but although she was smiling and gay there were a few lines perceptible on her fair brow and a slight look of strain in her eyes.

'We're going out to see the ducks now!' announced the little girl in her soft drawl, running up to her grandmother.

The tiny boy, breaking from his mother, ran up to his grandfather and taking both his hands began to climb up his legs.

'Up we go!' cried Sir Caradoc with a beaming smile, lifting the little boy into the air.

'Again!' cried the child gleefully as he reached the ground.

About the tiny figure, dressed from head to foot in blue, with his quick dancing movements, his flaxen curls and periwinkle-blue eyes, his radiant little face uplifted in delight, there was something flame-like, irresistible. As they watched him, the faces of all persons present instantly reflected that tender, doting expression which makes all child-lovers appear for the moment alike.

'Again!' cried the little boy, laughing his silvery laugh.

With a delighted chuckle Sir Caradoc lifted him high in the air. 'Up we go!' he cried.

'Put him down now, Caradoc,' commanded Lady Pomfret. 'He mustn't be allowed to get over-excited.'

Gently, reluctantly, his beaming smile slowly fading from his eyes, Sir Caradoc set the little boy down. He had always been fond of children and loved to play with them; but his little girls had been whisked away from him by their mother when he was young.

'What a boy he is!' said his grandmother proudly, setting the child on her lap. 'And now, my darling,' she said, taking Judy's hand and looking at her anxiously, 'what is this I hear about Peter having bought a house?'

'Oh, that?' said Judy, 'Peter did buy one last week but sold it again. I thought it comfortable enough, but Peter said it lacked character, so he has just bought an old Tudor hunting lodge said to have been built by Henry VII ——'

'You don't mean to say' — cried Aunt Maud, dropping her knitting and clicking her tongue in amazement — 'that you're going to try and squeeze in there! Why it's only got four rooms and no kitchen, and no bathroom and no sink ——'

'Oh, that'll be all right,' said Judy airily. 'Pepita can perfectly well cook in the coal cellar, and Peter is going to build a room for Abdulla and the pets on the roof ——'

'My darling child!' cried Lady Pomfret, the pressure on her daughter's hand deepening into a clutch, 'is that sane? Is that right! Two children, three servants and all those animals ——'

'Oh, we shall manage beautifully!' said Judy, stooping to give her mother a swift kiss. 'Don't worry, darling. Peter is wonderfully clever at knocking things up. And now, brats, we must go out — come along!' Taking a child by each hand, and waving her adieu to her mother and aunt, she left the room.

'There!' exclaimed Lady Pomfret in tones of exasperation, as the door closed behind them, 'isn't that exactly like Peter!'

Aunt Maud clicked her tongue. 'The great comfort is,' she said soothingly, 'that eventually he'll have Harsh and be a rich man some day. One has to remember,' she continued, taking up her knitting, 'that Peter has foreign blood in his veins. It is that, perhaps, that makes him so unlike other people.'

'He is unlike other people,' said Lady Pomfret severely, 'because he wishes to be. Everything in Peter springs from Conceit. Take all these crazy notions —'

Lady Pomfret took them, one by one. Peter's incurable restlessness: never wanting to be in the same place for more than six months at a time. ('Didn't he think of being a sailor?' queried Aunt Maud.) His complete disregard of Decency and Common Sense: wandering about last summer with Judy and the babies, sleeping in hay-stacks and barns! ('That's the gipsy strain in him,' put in Aunt Maud.) All these pet animals: 'I've nothing against keeping a dog,' said Lady Pomfret, 'but when it comes to lizards and pole-cats and mice!' . . .

Then there were Peter's ridiculous political sympathies. With every desire to sympathize with oppressed nationalities, it was difficult, all the same, said Lady Pomfret, to have much patience with these tiresome Balkan States who did nothing but eternally squabble with one another. And yet Peter had asked seven of them, speaking no common language but German (a language and a people that Lady Pomfret detested) — seven members of the Balkan States to try and settle their differences at tea at Conyngham Place! Naturally, said Lady Pomfret, all that had happened

was that a box of Caradoc's cigars had been consumed and a very good Crown Derby plate containing cream buns had been knocked over on to the ground and broken.

Again, the Irish. Of course, said Lady Pomfret, one believed in Home Rule. Had not she and Sir Caradoc suffered social ostracism — being cut by the Quarrymores and not invited to the Duchess of Hampshire's Garden Party — because they had followed Mr. Gladstone on this very question in 1886? Yet never should she forget (here Lady Pomfret made a grimace indicative of the utmost disgust), never should she forget the Filth and Squalor of Ireland when she and Sir Caradoc had visited the O'Maras in 1879! . . . And yet Peter had insisted — out of principle, so he said — on engaging, without proper references or advice from any one who really knew, an Irish nurse! What had followed? (Lady Pomfret took up her pencil.) The creature never properly sterilized Bonny's bottles and for three consecutive nights she had put the children to bed without their baths! 'After that,' said Lady Pomfret (laying the pencil down with finality on the table), 'I made Judy send her packing!'

Then there were the Jews. No doubt it was uncomfortable for them being forced to live all these centuries in exile; yet — it might be prejudice — but she must confess there was something about the Jews that she found it impossible not to dislike. Yet what should Peter do but bring back with him last year an Armenian — the worst type of Jew, so Lady Pomfret had been informed — as a butler! And if Maud could believe such a thing, Peter had then actually suggested that if William persisted in his ridiculous notion of marrying Annie ('though I told William,' said Lady Pomfret, 'that they would neither of them get the smallest

help or sympathy for such folly from me!'), Abdulla should take William's place!

... And lastly (Lady Pomfret wound up), the Red Indians. Without wishing in any way to belittle their powers of endurance and physical courage, from all one had heard about them they appeared to be a backward and unpleasant people whose disappearance no one need regret. And yet Peter — from some piece of fiddling ancestral sentimentality (here Lady Pomfret drew up her eyes) — must need christen his unfortunate little daughter by the ridiculous name of Pocahontas!

At this moment the door half opened. The face of Lydia appeared; then retreated.

'Come here, old lady!' called out her mother in gay, but peremptory accents. 'I want you for a minute!'

Lydia came.

'Look, child!' said her mother, taking her daughter's hand. 'Here is the list of your entire trousseau that your kind mother and aunt have been making out for you. There — look! You see you'll be well stocked for all occasions.'

'How lovely!' said Lydia dutifully, not looking.

'Here is the *lingerie* — what's that, Noble? Another present for Miss Lydia?'

'Two more, my lady!' said Noble, beaming.

With firm fingers Lady Pomfret untied the parcels.

'A Sèvres coffee set from Lady Beaton-Belvoir ... a lace shawl from Lady Foljambe ... Pretty, but modern,' she said, fingering the lace, 'but this, my child,' looking respectfully at the china, 'is Good.'

'Is it really modern?' said Aunt Maud critically. 'It looks like Brussels to me —'

'Modern,' said Lady Pomfret decidedly, 'but she can always have it made up into a dress. How do you like, my darling,' turning to Lydia, 'the feeling of being so rich?'

'Oh, all right,' said Lydia, looking out of the window.

'Don't forget,' continued her mother, 'that you have an appointment at Rosalie's this morning at twelve —'

'This morning!' cried Lydia in slight dismay. 'Oh, bother — I was going out with Peter and Judy in their motor-car —'

'In their *what?*' exclaimed Lady Pomfret sharply.

Lydia bit her lip. She had been indiscreet as usual.

'Their motor-car,' she repeated uncertainly. 'I thought perhaps Judy had told you that Peter was getting one —'

'A *motor-car!*' cried Lady Pomfret in accents of consternation. 'What for?'

'I don't know,' said Lydia, 'but people do have them now —'

'There!' exclaimed Lady Pomfret, turning an exasperated countenance towards her sister-in-law. 'Of all the crazy notions! But you my child,' she said hastily to Lydia, 'you have surely not forgotten that your mother-in-law is coming to lunch?'

'Oh, so she is,' murmured Lydia, her face falling.

For the moment she had forgotten this wedding over which the whole household was absorbed — this game which every one was enjoying, but of which she could not remember the rules. For this wedding, she felt, was not her wedding; it was her mother's and Aunt Maud's and the servants' and the dressmaker's, and in a minor degree, of course, poor John's. It had the fatiguing quality of those public festivals at which she, a bored spectator, had been obliged to appear; it was as meaningless as the stream of expensive and shining

objects that kept coming by post; as impersonal as the mysterious improvement in her character on which her mother daily commented; as unreal as the unmerited affection bestowed on her by comparative strangers — by her brand-new mother, hook-nosed, high-church, benevolently formidable, her new married sister, her new hearty cousins, prosperous new uncles, portly new aunts. It was like something that happened in books or to other people but could not surely be happening to her . . .

And yet it was true. It would happen. So she had willed, so decided. She had called back John of her own accord and was marrying him of her own choice.

The years that had passed had done their work. Bitter years, passed she knew not how. Living at home with a stone inside her instead of a heart; breaking down; going to hotels abroad; trying fruitlessly to find work . . . 'You'll have to marry,' Miranda had told her, and Judy had said the same. 'I shall have to marry,' Lydia had said to herself. 'Since I could not die, there is nothing else to be done.'

And one afternoon she had passed John Paynton walking in the Park. He had not recognized her. A week later she had passed him again; she had stopped him and held out her hand . . . 'Will you come and see us?' 'Do you really mean that?' 'I do . . .' And he had come. Then she had made her mother ask him to dinner . . . And one afternoon at about six o'clock he had called and found her alone . . . She thought, 'He'll surely say it now.' But after all it was she that had said it. It didn't seem to matter. A mere business arrangement . . . For John had changed. He no longer looked at her . . . Very honestly he had told her about it . . . A girl, not a lady: but they had been lovers. And he

had been troubled and ashamed . . . ‘I’m glad,’ thought Lydia. ‘It makes things fairer.’ Then they were engaged.

‘I need scarcely tell you,’ John said when he took her hand, ‘what pleasure this will give my mother.’

‘Nor I,’ said Lydia, smiling faintly, ‘what pleasure it will give mine.’

Long and tenderly Lady Pomfret had kissed her daughter that evening when they said good-night.

‘Are you quite sure, my darling,’ said her mother anxiously, ‘are you quite sure you mean it this time?’

‘Quite,’ said Lydia.

‘You do really care for him?’

‘Really.’

‘You are sure you will be happy?’

‘Sure.’

But there was still something to be said that could not be said. Lady Pomfret held her daughter closely in her arms.

‘I wish I had been able to help you better,’ she whispered, with tears in her eyes. ‘I wish I had understood . . . But you were always a difficult and wayward little creature —’

‘Oh, Mother,’ sighed Lydia, her wet cheek pressed against her mother’s, ‘don’t say that, darling! — it was always all of it my fault!’

And for that moment as they held each other closely, the bitter years were blotted out. . . .

Lydia had asked for a year’s engagement. John Paynton had suggested six months. ‘I don’t approve of long engagements,’ said Sir Caradoc. ‘After all,’ said Lady Pomfret, ‘he’s waited long enough. It’s nearly ten years, poor boy!’

The six months were whittled down to three.

Instantly had come a shower of congratulations. All

Lady Pomfret's friends had been most kind. Lady Pounder (now Lady Podbury) had called the day of the announcement in the paper, held out both hands to Lydia and said, 'Well, this *is* a surprise! But what a happy, happy day for your mother!' Mrs. Foster said, 'You dear thing — how wise of you! You must tell me absolutely *all* about it . . . Why, there's dear Agnes — how plain she's looking —' Mary Pendlebury wrote: 'I am of course delighted to hear of your engagement, but I had quite made up my mind that you were going to be the home bird!' Mrs. Umphleby, now in her dotage, sent some wax flowers in a glass case with her dear love and would Lydia come and see her any Wednesday afternoon. Aunt Minnie wrote a handsome cheque and added to it a more personal memento in the shape of a portable India-rubber bath which had been — so she said — her treasured travelling-companion for years. 'You mustn't sit in it,' she explained to her niece, 'and be very careful how you stand in it, as it so easily upsets. But if you set it down so! — and put one foot in, so! — then add a little water —' Lydia thanked her and promised to treat the old friend with the affection and respect it deserved. Sir Thomas Chudleigh asked Lydia and John to dinner, put an arm affectionately round each, said, 'I want to give you both my blessing'; then took from his bookshelf a first edition of Tennyson and kissed Lydia with tears in his eyes.

But as the wedding day drew nearer Lydia would stand still suddenly and think, 'It can't be true! Something will happen to stop it — it's all a dream . . .'

But this time there was no Miranda at home to save her. On the third finger of her left hand was John Paynton's diamond ring. The morning would bring fresh letters of congratulation; a heavier shower of presents would arrive by

post. And so the dust rolled on, the unceasing, merciful, merciless dust of every day.

The wedding was fixed for Wednesday. On Tuesday Lydia went out alone. She made her way to an old square in the heart of London where once Miss Miller had lived. But this kind friend had left her house: three years ago her health had given way, and after a serious operation she had gone abroad and might never, so her friends feared, return. Lydia had loved Miss Miller, not only for association's sake, but for her own. But it was not to think of her nor to hear news of her that she came to her house again.

Miss Miller's house was closed and shuttered. On many of the surrounding houses were notice boards saying that they were to be let or sold. Lydia had heard that the old square was condemned, that the houses might be pulled down and the garden they enclosed destroyed.

Long and intently she looked at the garden in the grey light of the London November day. The bench at the end seemed mouldy and peeling, the lime trees were black and bare. Long and intently she looked at the garden and at two ghosts whom she saw sitting there — two ghosts who sat under the lime trees in the darkness and who never said a word.

And as an unquiet spirit returns to earth to seek what had long since gone; as a mother stands in silence beside the grave of her only child; as the captain of a foundering ship looks his last on the skies as he sinks with all hands down, so Lydia looked at the deserted garden on that grey November day.

Then the thought she had not dared to think, the word she could not utter, forced itself slowly to her lips.

'Never,' she said, as she stood there motionless; and again,

she said, 'Never.' Then as she turned back from the quiet square to the noisy street once more she whispered, 'Never.'

... The wedding day dawned mild and cloudy; before noon a fine rain began to fall. But in the bustling house in which every one was active and excited, there was no time to look outside.

Up and down the stairs tramped men in green baize aprons, carrying flowerpots; in the dining-room hired waitresses meticulously arranged the tables. In the schoolroom (now the boudoir) Lady Pomfret, Aunt Edith, and Aunt Maud were putting the finishing touches to the wedding presents set out for show. In the study Sir Caradoc, a little perturbed, was writing an answer to an urgent message that had just been sent him from the office. In the pantry Noble, over a cup of tea with Old Maria and old Mrs. Box, was saying sentimentally, 'There! to think, that's the last of them gone!'

Only Lydia, sitting in her bedroom in her white satin petticoat, felt idle and alone.

'Oh, my sisters,' she sighed. 'Judy, Miranda! Perhaps if we were together for a moment we might laugh and be happy again . . .'

But Judy had sent a message saying that one of the children had not been well and that she and Peter would not come to the house till two. Miranda was coming up from Dormer End but would go straight to the church.

Listlessly Lydia went to the window and saw a little crowd on each side of the awning, standing patiently in the rain.

'They're waiting to see the wedding!' she thought in wonder. Then an idea flashed through her head.

'What if I ran away?'

How easy it would be to slip downstairs, throw on a coat, and escape by the back door! 'They're all so busy thinking about the wedding,' she thought, 'no one would notice that I had gone!'

A dream-like impulse assailed her to run away, to change her mind, and break her word to John as she had broken it years before.

'Even now it's not too late . . .' she thought.

There was a tap on the door and Miss Bass entered carrying a handbag.

'To-day is your day, Miss Lydia,' she said, as she waved and coiled Lydia's hair. 'Everything for the bride!'

With dextrous fingers she fastened on the wreath of orange blossom and arranged the long lace veil.

'There!' she exclaimed in triumph, surveying her handiwork. 'Keep the ends pinned up till the last moment . . . (Perhaps just the least little touch of powder? — there, that's just right!) Be careful not to sit on it, and I'm sure, Miss Lydia, you'll make a lovely bride!'

The wedding was like other weddings: full choral service, bunting, peal of bells. Aunt Minnie and Old Maria (now stone deaf and partly paralyzed), sniffed audibly all through the service, but the old lady who regularly, uninvited, attended every wedding at St. George's, Hanover Square had been removed to a private asylum three years ago. And the wedding, like other weddings, ultimately came to an end, leaving an exhausted family party to utter the customary congratulations and talk comfortably over the fire.

In the drawing-room Aunt Maud, Aunt Edith, and Aunt Minnie were gathered round the hearth. With her back to the fender, her skirts raised to show her little legs encased

in gaiters, Aunt Minnie warmed herself. Aunt Maud sat on the sofa with her knitting; Aunt Edith in the armchair took out her spectacles and opened a book.

'Grace looked charming in her bridesmaid's dress, didn't she?' observed Aunt Maud complacently. 'That shade of old rose suited her down to the ground. The hat, of course, is useless. I told Effie ——'

'I thought John's niece's nose looked red,' said Aunt Minnie. 'No wonder: standing about in those chilly clo'. I said to her, "My dear girl," I said, "I hope you've got on your thick combies ——"'

'Can you tell me,' said Aunt Edith, looking up over her book, 'if Fyella is at all suitable for children's underwear? I want to get material for our Mother's Clothing Club while I'm here ——'

'Take my advice,' said Aunt Maud decidedly, 'and go in for Vanola. I made all Grace's night-gowns out of it for years. It washes beautifully and never shrinks. Now if you will believe me ——'

Downstairs in the pantry Noble, as usual, was giving William a piece of her mind.

'Hover and *hover* again,' she said in her sharp shrill voice, 'Ladyship and I have told you as you ought not to call 'im Lord Gawdbury. And I heard you shout it out today as plain!'

'Wull, that's what he *sez*,' grumbled William, putting away the knives.

Upstairs in the boudoir Lady Pomfret was sitting on the sofa, a daughter on either side. Her face was serious but happy; she held Judy's hand in hers.

'Spendlove is excellent for children,' she was saying. 'He attended the Fitzroys, you know, when poor little Monica

was so ill last year. He's not, of course, as clever as old Spicer was, but he's perfectly sound. — Yes? What is it, Caradoc? — Do you want the Westminster?

'I have had it, thank you,' said Sir Caradoc, who had opened the door and stood, with his spectacles over his forehead, vaguely smiling.

'Come in, then,' said Lady Pomfret, a little impatiently.

But Sir Caradoc, murmuring something inaudible, softly withdrew.

'What does your dear father want?' asked Lady Pomfret.

Nobody answered.

'I don't approve of dosing,' continued Lady Pomfret, 'but a very little Pamphire the last thing —'

'Well, good-bye,' said Judy at last, rising and embracing her mother. 'I'll send a message to-morrow. I suppose you won't ever relent and put in the telephone? It is so convenient!'

'Fiddle!' laughed her mother, kissing her tenderly.

'Good-bye, darling,' said Miranda. 'Now don't tire yourself out by making long lists of invitations for Pocahontas' wedding, because Judy knows perfectly well that Elizabeth has got to be married first!'

'Don't forget to take the parcels of cakes that Noble has done up for you in the hall!' said Lady Pomfret, as she embraced her daughters. 'Good-bye and bless you! I shall see you both again, I hope, very soon.'

After the departure of her daughters Lady Pomfret lay back on the sofa, folded her hands, and closed her eyes.

... She would get those Chippendale chairs for the country cottage. Mole and Cheeseman's estimate had been quite moderate. There was the servant's bathroom to be

put in, of course, and the dining-room to be enlarged. Still, she would manage. That lovely sunny bedroom would be perfect for Judy's children . . . Lydia's too, perhaps, one day. Miranda's Elizabeth was a dear little girl, and the baby a beauty — quite like one of Lady Pomfret's own . . . There should be a garden seat for Caradoc by the pond. And the rose garden should be bricked round as it used to be at the Deanery. How papa had loved his roses! . . .

Lady Pomfret's breathing grew slower. Peacefully the clock ticked on. Suddenly a coal fell out of the fire, making a sharp little sound.

Lady Pomfret opened her eyes and put a hand to her hair. 'Nearly seven,' she said, as she gave a yawn that was half a sigh. She rose slowly; pulled down the front of her dress, then stood upright, composed and erect.

'And now,' she said, as she turned to the door, 'I must go down and see what that dear old gentleman wants . . .'

PART THREE

PART THREE

CHAPTER XX

LADY WHITEING

'I JUST came to warn you,' said Lady Whiteing, a slender fragile figure standing in the doorway, 'that Miss Bass will be here in half an hour; and I wonder, darling,' she went on timidly, 'if you would mind dreadfully taking your father to the Boltons before your dance instead of me? You see your Aunt Lydia is here ——'

'You mean,' said Elizabeth severely, 'that you are making Aunt Lydia an excuse for your own laziness. Don't you think you ought to try and cure yourself?'

'Perhaps,' said her mother meekly.

Two pretty girls were sitting with their feet on the mantelpiece. One of them was smoking a cigarette. Neither of them stirred.

Lady Whiteing stooped and picked up a book that was lying face downwards on the carpet. Then she picked up a cigarette end from the floor. In the fender lay another book which she replaced on the bookshelf.

Elizabeth watched her mother with a faint air of exasperation.

'Really, Mummie,' she observed, 'aren't there such things as servants?'

'On the Continent, perhaps,' said her mother, a trifle grimly. Mechanically she continued to move about the room, straightening furniture, putting things away.

Elizabeth got up.

'Look here, darling,' she said firmly, 'suppose you go back to the drawing-room where you belong?'

She took her mother by the shoulders, gave her a kiss, and gently pushed her from the room.

Left to themselves, the girls resumed their conversation.

'Men are cleverer, of course,' observed the younger girl.

'But less amiable,' said Elizabeth.

'They know more,' continued the other. 'They're more serious and much funnier.'

'I grant you,' said Elizabeth, 'that the best humourists are usually men.' She took up a volume of P. G. Wodehouse. 'This last, though, isn't quite up to his usual form: I must change it. Only Mummie will want me to get something high-brow that I can't read!'

'Home is hopeless, isn't it?' said her friend sympathetically, helping herself to a chocolate. 'I don't mean to stick mine a day longer than I can help. The moment I've left college I shall stand for Parliament. Conservative, of course. Susan will be frantic, no doubt, as she was last year when I was baptized and gave up being a vegetarian. If Hilary had any sense he'd back me up, but all he cares about is his non-sensical Smoke-Abatement nuisance. That's the worst of advanced parents — they do so cramp one's style!'

'Not so cramping as reactionary parents!' sighed Elizabeth. 'Look at Mummie! The only thing she cares about is Tranquillity and Contemplation. She hates humanity and progress and what I call Life. Then everything modern is on the index — cocktails, smoking, powder and lip-stick, jokes about buffiness; she can't read the novels I think so good and won't let us know the Grants ——'

'The Grants?' exclaimed Anne in surprise. 'Why on earth?'

'Oh, Mummie says they're second-rate — Sir Robert having been a war-profiteer, or something, and Lady Grant an actress. And she says Diana's fast —'

'So she is,' said Anne. 'But all the same their dance was heavenly. You should have been there! That angel Dick danced with me three times, and Tom came up with delightful old-fashioned courtesy and said, "May I have the next, and the next, and the next?" And Harry told me —'

Meanwhile Lady Whiteing had returned to the drawing-room to rejoin her sister, Mrs. Paynton, who had come up from the country to discuss a topic absorbing to them both.

'He gave them all a thorough examination,' Mrs. Paynton was saying, 'and he told me that the left grinder was septic at the roots. If it must come out — which will be a tragedy, as I don't know how I'm to manage without it — do tell me, which will be the cheapest — gas or local anaesthetic?'

Lydia Paynton, a widow in reduced circumstances, was dressed in an old-fashioned coat and skirt, her hat on the back of her head. Her face wore an anxious fussy expression common to women of middle-age. In her hand was a bag, into which she was vaguely peering. Suddenly she clicked her tongue and turned the contents of the bag into her lap.

'It's gone!' she cried in dismay. Feverishly she shook out her handkerchief, turned out her purse. 'I know I had it!' she wailed.

'What is it?' asked Miranda, sympathetically.

'My ticket!' said Lydia in distress. 'I took it on the way here to save time —' She rose, and going down on her hands and knees began to explore the carpet.

'Your return ticket?' asked Miranda vaguely, also looking round her.

'No, my tube ticket,' said Lydia, crawling about. 'Where in Heaven's name can it have got to?'

'How much was it?' asked Miranda, looking under the chair cushions.

'Twopence — no, threepence,' came in the constricted tones of one whose head is on a level with the floor.

'I dare say,' suggested Miranda considerately, 'that Daniel might be persuaded to lend it you: he wouldn't charge any interest —'

'It's not that,' sighed Lydia, getting up.

Miranda knew it wasn't that. Her face was nearly as concerned as her sister's as they both mechanically continued the now hopeless search . . . One did mind losing things! More and more as one grew older. And one did mind — oh, but passionately! — anything in the nature of Waste.

'It can't be helped!' said Lydia sadly, getting up. 'Well, as I was telling you, he said the left grinder —'

The door opened and a pretty little girl dashed into the room, an injured expression on her face.

'Oh, Mummie,' she whimpered, 'I can't find my Brownie films anywhere! I had them yesterday, and now they're gone. It's all your fault for letting Danny have them — I've looked everywhere!'

Miranda rose.

'One minute,' she said to Lydia.

Left to herself Lydia fidgetted, upset a flower vase, dabbed the water up with her handkerchief, yawned. When she came up to London, which she did seldom, to talk about really important things like Money and Teeth, she liked to have her sister to herself. She glanced round the room, which, furnished in quiet and excellent taste, offered many agreeable objects to the eye. But Lydia had never cared

about Things: nor did she, like Miranda, believe that furniture had feelings and a house a soul. She looked at a drawing of her father hanging on the wall and noticed with surprise that it was the face of a young man. For Sir Caradoc, who had lived to be eighty, was dead.

Miranda returned.

'Do go on,' she said.

Lydia went on.

Lady Whiteing, now over forty, was still beautiful, but though her figure was girlish, her face was careworn, and her expression preoccupied. Lydia was familiar with that preoccupied expression — an expression which may be seen on the faces of all women who are primarily mothers. Miranda had worn it ever since she had been engaged; and from that day Lydia knew that she had never possessed her sister's complete attention. Some deep rock-like quality, which, beneath her gentleness, Lydia had always felt in her sister, had gone. Year by year, day by day, inch by inch, Miranda had given herself to her children, her husband, her friends: all the intelligence and strength she possessed had gone into the task of considering other people; weighing their claims, listening to their grievances, giving sympathy, giving pity. For age had increased the natural divergence that had always existed between Miranda's heart and her head. Wise herself, she suffered fools gladly, and loved the best those who understood her least. A trained listener, Miranda encouraged confidences, but gave none. All women instinctively told her their troubles and came away comforted.

But the work of the heart is invisible. Miranda sat on no committees, wrote no pamphlets, took no part in any public work. 'Oh, she does nothing,' said Aunt Maud — now a

widow, a county councillor and an O.B.E. — 'she is a lady and just sits.'

A telephone tinkled sharply. Miranda took up the receiver.

'Yes, yes, yes — do! . . . Yes, of course — *any* day . . . Yes, that will be perfect. Four o'clock then — *how* lovely! Good-bye!'

'Who was that?' asked Lydia.

'Oh, only poor old Lady Bovingdon, she comes three times a week and stays hours. Poor old thing, she has no one to listen to her — '

Lydia clicked her tongue.

'Why do you do it!' she said. 'As for me I am thankful I've given up goodness. It wrecked my nervous system and never suited my face. But I suppose you'll never get out of it now — you will be hedged in by bores for the rest of your life.'

A little boy ran into the room, threw his arms round his mother's neck, and whispered something in her ear.

'All right,' said Miranda, kissing him, 'now run off — kiss your Aunt and fly . . . Yes, I promise. I won't forget.'

The little boy scampered away, leaving the door open. Miranda rose gently and shut it.

'It began even before the war,' she resumed. (Having done with dentistry, they were now at work on the manners and morals of the modern generation.) 'If you remember, Grace was kissed.'

'Grace was that kind,' observed Lydia. 'Still I agree things began to change somewhere about 1910 or 11. Post-Impressionists, jokes about lavatories, novels about homosexuality, and so on. And now I'm told they kiss indiscriminately. So odd, when no one but our husbands ever

kissed us. And they called us "Miss Pomfret" and signed themselves "Yours sincerely" till the day they proposed.'

'Elizabeth tells me,' said Miranda, 'that Diana Grant considers that the evening has been a failure if she isn't kissed by every man she dances with.'

'Does she speak the truth?'

'Approximately. She has got what's called sex-appeal.'

'Queer, when she's so hideous,' said Lydia, 'no nose, no neck, no waist, no hips, no bosom, no hair; goggle eyes and a mouth full of teeth.'

'That's the International Film-face and is much admired,' said Miranda. 'You must remember that beauty, like the soul, is out of date.'

'But she's such a bore!' protested Lydia.

'I agree that she never stops talking about herself,' said Miranda. 'But that's what men like. They never hear what a woman says if she's at all attractive.'

'Yes, I've noticed that,' said Lydia. 'Love is deaf. I wonder what would happen if we were to lose our sight like the white ants and live entirely by intelligence ——'

'Like the white ants,' said Miranda, 'we should lose our sex.'

'And a good thing too!' said her sister. 'Sex! — how tired I get of it — how monotonous it is! Every novel full of it — every play! Why must we for ever be absorbed in the subject of mating and propagating? Why can't writers make the central interest something really arresting like Money, for instance ——'

'Or a House,' said Miranda.

Presently Lydia said suddenly, 'Did we have sex-appeal?'

'I expect so,' said her sister.

Lydia pondered. In common with other girls she had

preferred to believe that men had been attracted to her for her intelligence, her originality, for some indefinable spiritual quality which she called her self. Now she knew that what had allured them had been something as little individual and as ephemeral as the powder she had been wont to put on her nose. It seemed strange to her that this sex-appeal, implying, as she did not doubt, much vanity as well as something even baser in its possessor, should make the whole difference between success and failure, happiness and unhappiness, in a woman's life.

'Is Diana respectable?' inquired Lydia indifferently.

'So far,' replied Miranda.

'I suppose it doesn't matter nowadays.'

'It matters here,' said Miranda. 'But then I'm deplorably old-fashioned. I like fidelity in the married and chastity in the unmarried.'

'I like affection to endure,' mused Lydia, 'and I uphold chastity strongly in the young. Particularly in men. But I think our generation made too much fuss about all that.'

Miranda was silent.

'Let us be just,' continued Lydia, 'to the present day. You and I may not like it, but in some ways it has improved. Women, at least, have more freedom than they used to have. Of course I think their clothes hideous, but they are undoubtedly more comfortable. Girls all work as a matter of course, and it's no disgrace now not being married. Then children are no longer bullied and terrorized by their parents ——'

'No,' sighed Miranda, 'it's the parents who are bullied and terrorized by their children ——'

'And girls are not afraid of their own emotions, or of men ——'

'On the contrary,' said Miranda, 'there is no emotion, however primitive or obscure, that they would shrink from exhuming and displaying, scientifically catalogued, to their partners. And it's the men now who are the backward and persecuted sex.'

'Well, at any rate young people nowadays don't take their love affairs with the morbid and ridiculous seriousness that we did —'

'They don't take anything seriously,' said Miranda, 'that I can see.'

'I expect they do,' pursued Lydia valiantly. 'Only not the things we took seriously. You see I believe in young people. I am on their side. I think they are better than we are. They are more generous, more spiritual. They are braver and more beautiful. I like their enthusiasms; I am happier with them than with people of my own age —'

'Perhaps,' suggested Miranda, 'it is because you don't see very much of them?'

'No doubt,' conceded Lydia. 'But all the same I am struck by their kindness to me when we do meet. They are so much nicer to their aunts than we used to be to ours. But perhaps it is only because we don't really know them.' She sighed. 'We too may have become sage-green. Tell me,' she pursued, 'who are Elizabeth's men friends?'

'Christopher Trotter, for one. He is nice — a scholar, spectacled and serious —'

'What? The son of Paul Trotter that Mother used to call "that little wastrel"?"'

'Yes. Then there's Lionel Worthington, the son of Ernest and Isabelle —'

'Oh, what are their children like?' cried Lydia with interest.

'Not a success, I'm afraid. Poor Isabelle—I am so sorry for her! She adores her sons and they've all turned against her. Lionel has only one interest and that's the Charleston; Ernest who is so brilliant has gone definitely to Bloomsbury, where Isabelle does her best to follow him; but with her education and upbringing it's a struggle. She can manage negro sculpture and Chinese poetry and at a pinch — but it is a pinch — experiments in living. But Ernest has just brought out this: what do you make of it?'

Lydia took up a bulky volume bearing the simple title 'Lust.' Many of the words were repeated indefinitely; some of them were printed upside down. There were no stops.

'Oh, I see,' said Lydia, 'it's the higher Cretinism. Back to the Bowels. No, I'm not civilized enough for it. Poor Ernest, poor Isabelle! How sad, when you think what a noble fellow Ernest was and what fine, high-minded young men all his friends were ——'

'But you used to dislike them!' interposed Miranda.

'Nonsense!' cried Lydia. 'I admired them enormously. After all, they cared about important things — they had character; they were Real. They may have been a little difficult to get on with, but they weren't charlatans like the present crew ——'

'A moment ago,' Miranda reminded her, 'you were upholding the present generation ——'

'Oh, well!' Lydia waved this away. 'Poor Worthingtons!' She sighed, and gazed in dejection at the carpet. 'Who is happy?' she asked.

It was a favourite chase with the sisters. 'Let us find,' they would say earnestly, 'one happy middle-aged woman.' Was Lady Caramel happy? They had lots of money and Caramel was in the Cabinet. No, Miranda would tell her,

Lady Caramel was miserable: she had no children and longed for them. What about Mrs. Pothouse? Cowed and bullied by her three daughters. Lady Bland? Didn't Lydia know? Young Bland drank and Monica had just had a facer. Mrs. Monday? Servant-trouble there — she was riddled with it. And so on. It was hopeless.

Both sisters suffered from an inability to derive enjoyment from the misfortune of others, and were thus cut off from one of the most popular distractions of middle age. Though fond of gossip, scandal depressed them. Their faces were overcharged with gloom.

'It's the war,' said Miranda.

'It's middle age,' said Lydia.

Middle age! What was to be said for it! Prosy, materialistic, anxious, fussy; thinking about money, worrying about teeth; never enjoying anything (that was Elizabeth's grievance); always wanting to be tidy; crazy about punctuality; depressing about plans: 'Better not to-day, dear' . . . 'I should give the whole thing up if I were you.' No, middle-aged women were blighters. No wonder mothers and daughters didn't get on.

'Have you seen Grace?' asked Lydia, to change the subject.

(Their cousin Grace had been happily married, happily divorced, and happily married again.)

'Her babies are too sweet — you should have them here!'

'No, thanks,' said Miranda, suppressing a slight shudder, 'you know how Judy and I feel about small children.'

Lydia did know.

The Whiteings were better off now. But during the war, when Daniel had joined up as a private and there was no money, no servants, and very little to eat, there had been

four small children on Miranda's hands night and day. Four children who could not dress or undress themselves, nor shut or open doors; who fell down and were hurt, who cried incessantly, who came out in rashes, who were sick, and who all had influenza at the same time . . . So that even now, when they were all (except Danny who had arrived inopportunistly with the Peace) old enough to look after themselves most of the time — even now the touch of a tiny hand could cause cold shivers to run down Miranda's spine, while as the thunder of artillery sounds to the ears of a shell-shocked soldier, so to Miranda's exhausted nerves still sounded the patter of little feet.

The door opened and Elizabeth said, 'Oh, Mummie, could you come to Danny now — he says it's urgent.'

'What's the matter with him?' asked Lydia, as Miranda left the room.

'Remorse,' said Elizabeth. 'He's a martyr to it. He warned Mummie that an attack might be expected to-night. Darling Aunt Lydia,' she observed, as she gently set her aunt's flapping hat from the rakish angle at the back of her head to the close position dictated by the reigning fashion, 'must you really have your skirts on the ground?'

'Certainly,' said her aunt stoutly. 'Since I am neither a child nor a ballet dancer I prefer to keep my legs decently covered. All this nonsense about fashions is sheep-like folly! The only thing any one has the right to ask a woman of my age is that she should be clean and neat.'

'I expect you're right,' said Elizabeth soothingly.

'And as for my face,' continued Lydia, as her niece still eyed her a little doubtfully, 'the only thing I can do with it nowadays is to wash it. Although I still adhere to the sponge I have frankly thrown up the powder puff. And now tell

me' (she changed the subject to one more congenial), 'have you met any interesting people lately?'

'No, I don't believe there are any interesting people, Aunt Lydia!'

'Why, what about John East — he's amusing, isn't he?'

'Yes, but there's nothing *in* him — besides he's so hideous.'

'Richard West then; he's handsome enough!'

'Yes. But he's so hearty and frank and natural. I want to know some one interesting and difficult and mysterious — some one that nobody understands and who has been frightfully unhappy — like Rochester, you know, or Hamlet ——'

'Rubbish!' said her aunt smartly. 'Morbid! Ridiculous! You young people are always wanting the moon!'

She broke off, as Elizabeth's father came into the room.

Sir Daniel Whiteing, whose curly hair was now an agreeable pepper and salt, had achieved Success. After his discharge from the Army, with a wound which still left him with a slight limp, his remarkable ability in devising theatrical entertainments for the troops had earned him a knighthood. Pleased with his success, his aunt, on her death a few years afterwards, had left him a portion of her large income, which, however, the Peace had considerably reduced.

Sir Daniel, who voted Conservative, shot and hunted animals, read the lessons in Church and detective stories at home, who was a doting husband and a devoted father, firmly upheld the pre-war standards of social and domestic life. Into his house neither flannelette or pork had ever entered. *Divorcées* were barred; and if his interest in the drama made it difficult to exclude actors and actresses altogether, at least they were either bishops' daughters or

baronets' sons against whom no breath of scandal had ever blown.

'I came in,' said Sir Daniel, addressing his daughter after he had shaken hands with his sister-in-law, 'with an elderly woman carrying a hand-bag, who seemed to be looking for you.'

'Oh, it's Miss Bass,' said Elizabeth . . . 'Good-evening, Miss Bass!'

'Good-evening, Miss Elizabeth,' said Miss Bass. 'Good-evening, Miss Stephen. Dear me — whatever was I thinking of! Mrs. Paynton, of course!'

'Did you hear?' said Lydia to Miranda, as they washed their hands together. 'Miss Bass mistook me for Aunt Minnie!'

'How very odd!' said Miranda.

Lydia thought it was very odd; for Aunt Minnie had been dead some years.

'How Mother would have approved of this house!' said Lydia, as she looked about her. 'The right aspect, the right part of London, hot pipes for the towels, an exquisite bathroom, a perfect linen cupboard! It might be Conyngham Place all over again — except that the drawing-room isn't hideous, there aren't so many servants, and not so much to eat.'

'There won't be much to-night, I warn you,' said Miranda, smoothing her hair.

Lydia smiled bravely. Daniel had a small appetite, and Miranda, who had never recovered from the effects of war economy, habitually starved herself. But Lydia, who was always hungry, marvelled how as a girl she could have turned up her nose at so much admirable food.

'I suppose it's all Daniel's taste,' she said.

'Everything, down to the note-paper. It's perfect, as far as London houses go ——' Miranda sighed. No house would ever be like Dormer End.

'Now that you are back in London, meeting all our old set, with Elizabeth going to all the right functions, and Noble's niece in the kitchen, Mother would have had to admit that your marriage was a success!'

Miranda said gently, 'I think that she would be sorry it wasn't Judy.'

She too wished that her mother could have seen her house. She wished that her mother could have seen Elizabeth now that she was grown-up; that she could have loved little Danny, who was such a darling; that she could have come to believe that Miranda's marriage had been very happy. But Lady Pomfret, who in life had shut her eyes to many things, had shut them now to all.

After dinner (clear soup, one rissole, two cheese straws), Lydia departed to catch her train and Daniel and Elizabeth went off to their party.

Left to herself — an event of rare occurrence — Miranda sat down before the drawing-room fire.

What should she read? The last novel from Mudie? No; it was a detective story. The dismal Dean? She did not feel like uplift to-night. Thoughtfully she took the 'Morning Post' from the table and began to scan the list of situations wanted.

Lady can confidently recommend good house-parlourmaid, seven years situation. Tall, neat, scrupulously clean. . . .

A woman's face, vital, compelling, came between her and the paper . . .

Poor mother! thought Miranda. Lydia had never been

just to her, had never understood her, or tried to put herself in her place. She had never appreciated her courage, or known how much she had suffered. Only a mother knew that. Lydia did not know what it was to bear children, to look after them night and day, to spend all your love and devotion on them, and then to find them growing up critical, contemptuous . . .

Lady companion, eight years present position, desires change. Methodical, conscientious. Church of England, tactful, bright, good packer, fond of dogs. . . .

Mother had courage. She was so terribly ill! And she had no one to help her, and there was always so much to do: holidays to be arranged for three times a year, people always in and out, so much entertaining, and always worry about money.

Mother lived in London all her married life — London, dirty, noisy, smoky, with bells always ringing, servants always giving notice, children always ailing . . . In London Mother had died. . . .

Refined Belgian family would receive boy and girl in exchange for hospitality . . .

People died, youth faded, happiness did not last. The sadness of life was inevitable: but need it be made sadder than it was? Must all that had been loved and cherished once be turned to mockery now? Must pity go, as beauty was going, as duty and reverence had gone? Was pleasure all that mattered, and speed the only end? Were there no pleasures higher than jazzing all night and scorching along black roads all day — violating the peace of the country and seeing nothing but dust? Should fidelity be derided, reason dethroned, and love held cheap? Must youth, so eager for

freedom and happiness, trample without mercy the weary, the defeated, the old? Should it turn in revolt from the figure of the suffering Christ, speaking to us of pain and pity, as from all that it most longs to forget?

Miranda put down her paper. She sighed and looked into the fire. In its glowing heart she saw a vision that came to her when alone . . . An old red house in the country. A garden full of flowers. All the children grown up — the boys out in the world, the girls married. Long days listening to the silence. Strolling in the woods to hear the nightingale . . . Home to the dreaming house hand in hand.

CHAPTER XXI

LADY RENDALL

'Ask Peter for a bit of wire, will you? — Gizi, I can't have your hair tied up with straw — Some one take Randolph out of the milk jug quickly! — Has any one touched my scissors?'

Judy, wearing a cotton overall over her Paris frock, her hair cut and her legs bare, issued her commands in a clear sharp voice while she worked ceaselessly. The move was nearly completed. Not a very lengthy one this time, since the 'Tom in Bedlam,' the public house which Peter had been trying to run during the winter months, was only a couple of miles from the cowshed where they proposed to spend the summer; nor was moving a novelty in Judy's life, as she had moved her family and her belongings every few months for the last fifteen years. But like most of the moves it was inaugurated by Peter and had been decided upon in a flash.

At twelve-twenty the night before he had remarked to his wife, 'We clear out the first thing to-morrow.'

'And it's just as well,' said Judy parenthetically to Lydia. 'We were running the "Tom" at a loss and Pocahontas is really much too pretty for a barmaid. It didn't matter as long as the customers were only our own friends and the farm labourers, but the "Chances" would try and make love to her.'

Judy was dealing rapidly with a hold-all stuffed with blankets, a packing-case containing assorted crockery, a wheelbarrow full of clothes. The cowshed was already

partially furnished with a large copper pot containing flowers, a piece of frayed tapestry, a frying-pan, a beaver, and a sewing-machine. Beside her sister stood Lydia in an aquascutum and spectacles, wearing on her face an expression of gloom and fatigue. She wanted a duster, she wanted soap and hot water, but most of all she wanted a good stout charwoman who would go down on her knees and scrub. . . .

'Are you really going to put the things in just as they are without cleaning them?' she asked doubtfully as Judy thrust a jug and basin into her hands.

'Pooh!' cried Judy. 'Who cares about a speck of dust?'

It was more than a speck, thought Lydia. It was layers and layers of historic and geographical grime — red dust from the Mediterranean coast, white dust from the Caucasus, yellow dust from Central Europe, grey dust from Red Russia, and black dust from Whitechapel.

'Let's get these mattresses fixed up first —' said Judy, who was stuffing a sack which had recently contained lime with waste-paper.

'You can't really induce any one to sleep on that, can you?' asked Lydia hopelessly.

'Why not?' asked Judy, in surprise.

Judy could make anybody do anything. She could make the vicar of Little Harsh pay five pounds for a clothes-basket attached to a tricycle and believe that he had obtained a donkey carriage for a bargain. She could make Lady Emeline Trotter, who was unused to children and disliked animals, house and nourish Lenin, the youngest Goring boy, his five white rats, and three puss-moths, for six months and be sorry when they left. She could make Walter Dadbury, who had lost a kidney in the war and who had never really recovered from his badly bungled operation for appen-

dicitis, live on sardines, sleep in a portmanteau, and drink tea out of a saucer (when there was any tea to spare), and yet prefer to spend his holiday with the Gorings rather than with any one else. She could make an omelette without breaking eggs.

It is true, of course, that egg powder, however skilfully prepared, never tastes quite the same as the freshly laid produce of the living hen. 'But if there are any complaints,' Judy had said sharply, 'I'll make Bonny climb the wych elm and take the thrush's nest!' — a remark which caused Lydia, who was a passionate member of the Society for the Protection of Birds, to finish up her plateful at one gulp.

'Lenny darling,' said Judy, as a little boy, pink-cheeked, white-skinned, and stark naked, scampered into the cow-shed, 'I wish you'd take Randolph away with you; he puts his nose into everything. And where's Marion? Remember she must be kept out of the way of the Communists — they haven't an ounce of self-control. And what about putting something on? The Duchess may be round at any minute.'

'Why, wowwy?' said the little boy. 'She's used to us. Marion's all wight. She coiled wound Daddy's hat.'

'Oughtn't she to have a little milk or something to keep her torpid?' asked Lydia anxiously. Marion was a snake.

'She's had a fly,' said Lenin carelessly. 'Mummie, we want to bathe.'

'All right, only be dry and dressed by tea-time. What's that you've got on your back?'

Lenin's dimpled posterior was covered with a bluish black smudge.

'Only ink,' he explained casually. 'You see I tore my twousers and Gizi inked my behind so that it shouldn't show. It's weally *quite* all wight ——'

'Give your trousers to me,' said Judy firmly.

There were limits even to Judy's powers. Three things she could not do. She could not keep the children clean and tidy; she could not evict the Duchess from the Dower House; she could not find Peter a job.

And yet Peter was really remarkably gifted. He could charm snakes. He could tame zebras. He could play any air once heard correctly from memory on any instrument. He could make baskets out of rushes, frying pans out of biscuit tins, boots out of bandboxes, birds' nests out of boots. Once he had saved Judy's life when she was very ill by contriving to keep a punkah going all night, pulled by an American nurse in a rocking-chair. The punkah bar was weighted by a revolver, in the barrel of which was a wild bee's nest. When the punkah stopped the bees flew out and the nurse woke up . . . And yet neither the Zoo nor the Saxophone Orchestra would offer him anything approaching a livelihood, while as for the gadget industry — 'What chance,' asked Judy bitterly, 'has poor Peter with Woolworth's against him in that?'

For Peter had left the Guards. One could not blame him. He had stood it long enough. But the spark was lit two years before the war by the Colonel (now a General) who had never understood Peter or appreciated his pets. One morning the she-bear, Lucy, had escaped, and when prowling about, as was her wont, she had climbed into the bedroom where the General's wife (then in delicate health) lay asleep. On waking to see Lucy at the end of the bed with her paws up and her mouth wide open (she wanted a bun, poor thing!) the General's wife had uttered a piercing scream and had given herself up for dead. But although she was subsequently none the worse for her fright — 'Muriel Crad-

dock never had any self-control!' remarked Judy contemptuously — it was poor Lucy who had to die. When Peter learned that his oldest friend had been shot by the General's orders he as nearly as possible shot the General. There was a strong and stirring scene — at the end of which Peter had sent in his papers.

After this for two years Peter's dream had come true: he had wandered round Europe with a hammer and a zither. His wife and two children had wandered with him, and in the first week of the war, in an old Hungarian castle, to the strains of the Csardas played by Peter's distant relatives, the Kopacsis, his third child, Gizi, had been born.

It was hardly a surprise to those who knew Peter when, almost as soon as war was declared, he turned conscientious objector. Nor was it out of keeping with his character that on his release from Dartmoor he should have joined the Sinn Feiners and fought against the Black and Tans. A ball in the leg, sent by a follower of Michael Collins while Peter was engaged in burning a house for de Valera, had temporarily quenched his interest in Ireland; and after his leg mended and the Settlement had been signed he had set off with his family for Moscow. Moscow had pleased Peter: it was experimental and strenuous; while for a man who nearly all his life had existed under one form of tyranny or another, a new type of tyranny, totally opposite and far more severe, was exactly what he craved. It was natural, too, that Peter, whose nature was intensely sensitive, markedly fastidious, morbidly proud, deeply religious; who was gifted with a masterful temper, a subtle mind, and an intense, almost abnormal degree of individuality, should welcome the dictatorship of the masses, the overthrow of the Church, and the annihilation of the individual mind and will.

But the Bolshevik régime, although morally and politically stimulating, proved, particularly when in conjunction with the famine, ruinous to the digestive system; and Peter, his wife and children, all suffering severely from dyspepsia, were obliged to return to England.

In the mean time Lord Rendall had died, and Harsh and all that it stood for passed to his eldest son.

There stood the great historic house . . . The tiles were off the roof, two chimney stacks had fallen down; the armoured knights were brown with rust, the rats had gnawed away the tapestry, a white owl made her nest in the haunted room . . . The pictures were sold. Boniface Goring (the explorer with a ruff and a hammer who had died defending Jamestown from the Indians with Smith) had sent Bonny, the eldest boy, to Eton: Kopacszi Gizi (Christian name last), had kept the family for two years.

'We shall never get rid of Harsh!' sighed Judy. They had spent a winter in the basement — the only part of the house where the rain didn't come in; but the rats had kept them awake, sound sleepers as they were, by gnawing their toes. Peter had done his best. His hammer had never been still. He had patched up the roof, put a lick of paint (only a lick, paint being expensive) on the front of the house, trained creepers over the worst holes in the walls. The gnawed tapestry and the owl's nest he had left. 'It adds character,' he had said.

Harsh possessed beauty as well as character: a romantic, tragic beauty, with its air of battered pride and noble endurance, with its wide lawns and stately avenues, its old twisted wych elms bending over the rose-hung lake, the haunt of king-fishers, the home of water-lilies.

But no one would buy Harsh.

Suddenly Peter announced at breakfast one morning that he had given Harsh to the Communists as a Club.

'We must clear out of it to-day,' he had said.

Judy disliked the Communists, who although quiet and not very numerous, appeared to be all-pervading.

'They might remember,' she complained, as a couple of Indians followed by a gloomy little man with a beard and blue spectacles ambled past the cowsheds, conversing in sad, flat voices about greyhound-racing, 'that this part of the property belongs to *us*. I'm always shooing them back, but they won't stay put!'

'If only the Duchess would die,' sighed Lydia, as she arranged the sacks on the floor of the smaller cowshed, 'then you could live in the Dower House.'

'She's much more likely to marry and found a family,' said Judy, 'old people don't die nowadays. Look at Lady Georgina and Sir Trevor Dadbury, nearly ninety and in the pink of health, eating eight-course dinners every day and adding mortgage after mortgage to Chilton — and poor Daddles in his poky lodgings, out of work and without a penny! Look at Sir Thomas Chudleigh — not that any one wants him to die. I dare say Old Maria is still going strong. Which reminds me, I suppose you know William has bought the "Tom"?"'

'What William?' asked Lydia.

'Our William, Conyngham Place William. Don't you remember, he married Annie? Well, he was made a Brigadier-General during the war and then became a publican (which was always his dream), and is now very fat and prosperous. But he still breathes as hard as ever and said he did so hope he would have the pleasure of seeing Mr. Pake and Sir Chobble down here soon, and how much it grieved him that

the old Place, as he calls No. 47, should have been turned into flats. Here, shove these in, will you?’

‘Can you all sleep here?’ asked Lydia, who remembered that her sister had once been a sanitary inspectress. ‘Isn’t six in one room rather overcrowding?’

‘It isn’t a room,’ said Judy, ‘and there’ll be eight. Evelyn and Dicky are sure to turn up. Why’ — she broke off with an exclamation of pleasure — ‘here is Evelyn!’

A graceful girlish figure in divided skirts, carrying a bandbox, stepped delicately into the cowshed.

‘Dear Judy!’ he exclaimed in a light, pleasant voice, ‘you see I’ve been true to my word — here it is!’

‘This is Evelyn Polkinghorne,’ said Judy (she pronounced it Poon). ‘He’s just gone down from Cambridge and is working at Madame Cerise’s — he trims hats most ravishingly. Why, that is really *too* lovely! I must put it on.’

‘One minute,’ said Evelyn anxiously, ‘you must wear it *so* —’ and he gave the hat a little twist, ‘there — that’s perfect! Don’t you think it suits her?’ he inquired, turning deferentially to Lydia.

Lydia agreed. But then Judy looked beautiful in everything. She would look, thought Lydia, beautiful always. Age would not dim the blue of her eyes or blur the fine edge of those delicate features.

‘Be a lamb,’ said Judy, ‘and fetch Pocahontas; she’s over by the potato patch. Tell her I want her to be tidy for tea.’

Evelyn flitted obediently away.

‘How pretty he is!’ said Lydia, looking after him. ‘And what charming manners young Cambridge has nowadays. Is he in love with Pocahontas?’

‘He was,’ said Judy, ‘but the silly girl doesn’t care for him.’

'So now he's in love with you?'

'With us all, a little,' said Judy. 'Oh, here you are,' she broke off as her daughter appeared — 'look, darling, we'll have tea on the grass outside; will you put the cups round? You children must drink out of saucers.'

Pocahontas Goring was as beautiful as a girl of seventeen has any right to be. It might be thought, indeed, that she exceeded her rights. Selecting unfairly the best features from both sides of the family, she had her father's tall slenderness, her mother's milk-white skin and starry blue eyes, her father's Grecian nose and forehead, her mother's small mouth and rounded chin. A smouldering flame of coppery hair fell down her back to her waist. Had she lived in 1880 or at the end of the eighteenth century, beauty-loving mobs would have followed her everywhere. As it was Lady Grant, that most fashionable of hostesses, merely observed, 'Pretty? How can she be pretty with all that untidy-looking hair! And what impossible clothes!'

'Dicky has fallen terribly in love with Pocahontas!' whispered Judy as her daughter carried off the cups and saucers. 'It's rather sweet!'

'Who and what is Dicky?' asked Lydia cautiously.

'Why, Dicky Pratt, the son of the Cambridge philosopher who died, you know: he's one of Simon's curates — such a pet.'

'Oh, that Pratt? Did he die? I *am* sorry — what was it, the war?'

'A fish bone, I believe,' said Judy; 'he couldn't swallow it.'

'Of course not,' sighed Lydia. 'He took nothing on trust. How uncompromisingly he rejected God, the Absolute, all the old theological superstitions — and now I suppose his

son swallows down the Thirty-Nine Articles as though they were so much pap!' She sighed again.

Then rousing herself, she asked suddenly: 'But has Dicky anything beside his curacy?'

'Oh, nothing whatever,' said Judy, 'poor pet!'

'But you don't mean to say you're encouraging him!' cried Lydia sharply. 'A *curate* — without a penny! And that exquisite creature! Why, she might marry anybody!'

'She won't get the chance!' said Judy sadly. 'The girls will never have the time we had! She's going into the Duchess's Communal Boot Factory in the autumn — they are very well looked after — physical jerks every two hours, cocoa at eleven, free cinemas and dances twice a week — but it won't be the same as life at Conyngham Place!' She sighed. 'And such dull clothes as they have to wear nowadays — no frills, no jewellery —'

'By the way,' broke in Lydia, 'what have you done with your tiara?'

'Went up the spout when Peter was in Dartmoor,' said Judy, 'and a good place for it too, since they'll never be worn again. Catch Bonny, will you? I want him to get the buns for tea. We shall want a dozen and a half, tell him, not more. Sir Deighton Stuart says he'll bring a cake; he's coming over in his Rolls, but I said I could only have him if he brought his own mug. He's tremendously taken with Gizi — child though she is —'

'Couldn't he marry one of them?' suggested Lydia. 'He doesn't look old —'

'Certainly not!' said Judy, and whispered something in Lydia's ear.

'Gracious!' exclaimed Lydia, 'and mother always said he was such a paragon!... All right, I'll go: a dozen and a half —'

Boniface Smith Goring was playing on the lawn with his dog. He leaped, he bounded, he threw a ball high into the air and caught it again behind his back. His body was like a playing fountain, a leaping fish, a flying swallow; light seemed to flash round him, to shine through him. He was the visible spirit of perpetual motion and of eternal youth.

‘Bonny!’ called Lydia. ‘Bon-ny!’

‘Hullo, hullo,’ sang out Bonny, throwing the ball across to his aunt. ‘Well caught. Here, pitch it back —’

‘I can’t pitch,’ sighed Lydia. Women never could. She threw the ball short, but Bonny did not wait to pick it up. Like an arrow he had darted across the lawn to a gate in the field which an old gentleman was attempting to open.

‘Let me do that for you, sir,’ exclaimed Bonny, taking the old man’s stick and holding the gate open for him politely.

‘Why, it’s Uncle Tom!’ cried Judy. ‘He’s going over to the Duchess. They’ll all be here for tea. That means two dozen —’

‘Is Bonny always as polite as that to the aged?’ asked Lydia, ‘or is it Eton?’

‘No, it’s Bonny,’ said Judy proudly. ‘He’s always been the soul of chivalry. Would you like to help me cut the bread and butter? Butter by courtesy; but perhaps if you spread it thin they won’t taste, and if you can persuade them to try our home-made quince marmalade they won’t be able to taste anything else again!’ she laughed.

Judy could turn destitution into a picnic, adversity into a joke; she carried her courage carelessly, her heroism like a feather. Yet not for a moment, not for all the world, would she have lived her life over again.

'Now catch that boy,' said she.

'Bonny!' cried Lydia, '*Bon-ny!*'

But Bonny was running after something else.

'Oh, stop, stop!' cried Lydia, suddenly horrified. 'Bonny, quick — stop your dog — he's after a cat!'

'At her!' cried Bonny, 'catch her — good dog!'

Bonny ran, the dog ran, and after them ran Lydia crying out, 'Stop! Stop!' but the cat was ahead, and to Lydia's intense relief it ran up a tree.

'How can you let Bonny set his dog on to a cat!' she panted indignantly, as she returned to Judy. 'It's horribly cruel!'

Judy was cutting bread and butter.

'There are too many cats about,' she said hurriedly.

'That's not the point,' said Lydia hotly. 'It's cruel and it's not his cat. You ought to stop him.'

'I can't,' said Judy; 'he's a boy and boys are like that. You must remember we knew nothing about men till we married. They are not like women. Men are cruel. But one has to bear with them.'

'I suppose,' said Lydia unwillingly, 'boys are naturally savages; and yet he was humane and sensitive enough till he went to school —'

'Bonny's very conventional,' said his mother, who believed him to be perfect — 'and Eton's more so.'

'I know,' said Lydia; 'it's what people pay for.'

Public schools, she knew, taught boys cricket, the classics, and courage, but not pity — pity being born too late. They encouraged boys, who could pitch balls naturally and did not much mind getting hurt themselves, to pitch balls scientifically and to mind hurting others even less . . . Bonny's father was a pacifist and Bonny idolized his father; but he

himself was of the type who would volunteer immediately and without a qualm for any war. 'A born V.C.', Lady Pomfret had called him.

'How proud Mother would have been,' added Lydia regretfully, 'if she could have known that he would get into the Eleven —'

'Don't,' sighed Judy.

Lydia knew what this beloved son of a beloved daughter had been to her mother. But she could not know what her mother herself had been; she could not guess what the loss of that kindness, that strength, had meant to the daughter who had always loved her and by whom she had always been loved.

At this moment a light spring was heard on the roof, and bounding gracefully on to the ground Bonny presented himself.

'My dear old fish, what's all this about pop for the veg?' he said, heartily embracing his mother. 'Shall I pinch it off the old fruit, or pay?'

Judy counted out some money carefully.

'Now for Heaven's sake don't give any of it away —' she implored him.

'He'd give the coat off his back to any one who asked for it —' she sighed fondly, as Bonny sped away.

'Like his mother,' thought Lydia, who was wearing Judy's aquascutum. For Judy was never so busy but she could make time to do a good turn to somebody else; nor was she ever too poor to find something to give to somebody poorer still.

'Now come on,' said Judy, who was always working against time, 'let's get this barrow load out of the way before any one turns up —'

As they pushed the barrow into the shed a rusty metallic object fell off with a clank.

'What on earth is that?' exclaimed Lydia. 'Couldn't you throw some of the scrap-iron away?'

'Scrap-iron indeed!' cried Judy indignantly. 'It's the duck-crusher and invaluable.'

'Not that old thing Lady Foljambe gave you as a wedding present!' cried Lydia excitedly. 'Why — so it is! I remember the dint on the handle . . . it's the only thing I should have known it by,' she added, gazing at it sentimentally. 'What on earth do you do with it?'

'It makes sausages,' said Judy, 'and quince marmalade, and Marion sleeps in it and it's used as an incubator and a work box and a home for Lenny's white mice. Peter found it stored away in the house — you remember we hadn't time to pass it on before we went abroad — and said that it had evidently never done an honest day's work in its life, but that he'd soon teach it. Tell me, am I tidy? We must go and collect the children for tea.'

Judy took off her overall and hung it on a nail.

'What is it?' she asked a little sharply as a tall graceful figure with a shock of iron-grey hair and a hammer in his mouth stalked into the cowshed.

Peter Goring muttered something inaudible and went over to the packing case. He was as handsome as ever, but his eyes had grown grim and his shoulders were a little tragically bowed.

'I do hope,' said Judy anxiously, as she and her sister went out, 'that Peter won't change all the furniture just as I've got it straight —'

The loud crash of a hammer drowned Lydia's reply.

Outside it was summer. Blue was over their heads and

blue was at their feet. Between the sky and the forget-me-nots was a foam of pink apple-blossom: in the orchard the young leaves of the oak trees wore the golden green hue of the green woodpecker who flew, laughing wantonly, into the wood. Birds, intoxicated with happiness, sang each other down: all the air smelt like sweet-brier.

Through the orchard, down the beech avenue, went Judy and Lydia to the lake.

'Oh, how beautiful!' Lydia cried.

All four children were swimming in the lake. They were beautiful children, fair-skinned, small-boned, swift as fishes, white as water-lilies. Lydia thought of an old fairy story she had read in childhood, how the water nixies of Sedge Island had by their beauty and enchantment lured away a fisher-girl to follow them in a boat till she was drowned.

Gizi, on the diving board, was poised like the sickle of a young moon. Her white young body in all the innocent nakedness of childhood showed the first tender curves of budding womanhood: she would never be more beautiful, thought Lydia, than she was now at this exquisite moment of May. Splash! In she went, swimming steadily under water till she reached the bank.

Lydia stole a glance at Judy as they stood together watching the children. She saw again the young girl in her white ball dress, the bride in her wedding gown, the child with her straight fringe and forget-me-not eyes, fanning her pink cheeks with her red pinafore. Now she saw on her sister's face the look of tender pride, of unguarded pleasure that she remembered on her mother's face when she looked at Judy . . . But a mother can never be off guard for long.

'Time to come out!' she cried.

Lydia's attention was caught by the sight of a bullet-headed youth in bathing shorts sprinting towards them from the other side of the lake.

'Who's that?' she asked.

'Oh, it's Sydney Pimm,' said Judy, 'the Duchess's chief engineer, and most capable: in love with Bonny, or Peter, or both.'

'It seems to be the habit here,' observed Lydia.

Sydney Pimm, who upon closer view turned out to be a young woman in modern dress, came up to them, panting.

'I say,' she said, 'Her Grace and Sir Thomas are just coming over, and she wants to know if she may bring three of the Communists with her to tea.'

'Blow!' cried Judy, 'the buns won't go round: if it's the Egyptians or the Finns, they eat like sharks. Hi! children!' she screamed, 'come out at once! — And do, like a lamb,' she said, turning to Sydney, 'keep the Communists out of the way till the children are dressed: they are fearfully middle-class and genteel and would have fits if they saw them all stark naked . . . Goodness only knows what they've done with their towels . . . Quick, Lydia — your mackintosh — throw it over Pocahontas. Now, Gizi, fly! Stop splashing, Lenny — Bonny, run like a hare for the house!'

But it was too late.

The Duchess, a juvenile figure in an Eton shingle and skirts above her knees, followed by the erect and stately figure of Sir Thomas Chudleigh, two gentlemen of Oriental extraction, and a very stout, red-faced lady in a plaid dress, advanced smilingly with extended hands. At the same moment the sound of a motor-horn rent the air and a large Rolls-Royce, filled with well-dressed people, came skimming down the drive.

'Gosh! It's Sir Deighton Stuart, Lady Emmeline, and a whole crowd of smarties,' murmured Judy. 'Lenny — your towel, for Heaven's sake!'

But nothing could stop Lenny when the water had got into his head. Dashing uproariously along the bank, waving his towel over his head, he screamed at the top of his voice: 'Hullo, Comrade Thomas! Hullo, Citizen Duchess! Hullo, old Fish-Faces all! Come and have a dive!'

After him, barking furiously, went Bonny's dog, and after the dog, ran Bonny, shouting, 'Hi! you blighter — you've got my towel!' and after him ran Gizi, crying, 'It isn't your towel — it's mine!' and after her ran Pocahontas, the tails of her aunt's aquascutum flapping in the breeze; and after them all ran Peter, his hammer discarded, his shirt unbuttoned, laughing like a boy.

'Oh, well,' said Judy, philosophically, 'they'll get dressed some day. And now we must go back and give the Duchess some tea.'

CHAPTER XXII

ANOTHER JULY

SIR THOMAS CHUDLEIGH celebrated his ninetieth birthday by inviting his nieces to tea with him. They were not his real nieces, only one of whom — a frail septuagenarian, in a nursing home, recovering from an operation for cataract — remained alive; but they were the members of the generation which he still considered young who most made him forget his years.

All three arrived together.

'Many, many happy returns!' cried Miranda. 'I've brought you a cake with ninety candles all of different colours: the children chose it.'

'And I've brought you some raspberries from the cottage and some fresh eggs,' said Lydia.

'And I've brought you four birthday odes from the children,' said Judy. 'Bonny's is in Greek, Pocahontas's is in Portuguese, Gizi's in Hungarian, and Lenin has written three lines in Russian characters which he declares is a sonnet.'

Sir Thomas, who rose from his chair without difficulty, embraced his nieces in turn. In the old-fashioned drawing-room of his quiet London house, where, at varying intervals throughout their lives, he had entertained them before, they sat down to tea.

'I am delighted to hear,' he said, turning to Judy, 'that the younger generation is turning to verse. I am told there has been a considerable recrudescence of poetry lately, but

I am not able to keep up with all the modern poets. When I was a young man we all swore by Tennyson — but I suppose he is hopelessly out of fashion now.'

'On the contrary,' said Lydia, 'he's come in again. You've known how to wait!'

'Ah! That is good, indeed. He is to me still one of the greatest of poets, though my impressions of him as a human being were less favourable. Did I ever tell you of the famous occasion when your father and I were caught trespassing at Faringford?'

'No, Uncle Tom — do tell us!' cried the sisters.

And he told them again, while they did not listen.

'The Bard was a great cult of my mother's,' continued Sir Thomas, 'and she set her heart on having him to stay with us when we lived at Budcombe Manor —'

'I remember your taking us to see Budcombe Manor when we went to Spode —' said Lydia.

'Ah, yes,' said Sir Thomas, 'I haven't been to those parts for a great while.'

'Don't go!' sighed Miranda. 'You wouldn't know Spode now. There is a huge pier and a bandstand and several cinemas. The walk over the cliffs is all golf links and bungalows and the little inn where we stayed is now a monster Sanatorium —'

'Dear me!' said Sir Thomas, 'how England is changing — and all for the worse. There is hardly a country-house left which is still inhabited by its rightful owners. As for London — it seems to me hardly recognizable. As a young man I used to walk across the fields from Kensington to Chelsea, and where Victoria Road now runs, it was all market gardens. The houses in that neighbourhood were built out of the remains of the Great Exhibition which I well

recollect being taken to see by my Aunt Caroline. She admired the Crystal Palace exceedingly ——'

'People are beginning to admire it again,' said Lydia.

'Was that your first recollection of London?' asked Miranda, who loved to draw out old people to speak of their youth.

'Dear me, no. We came to live in Bryanstone Square in 1846. I remember quite well my father's distress when the Corn Laws were repealed, as he declared that this would mean the break-up of the Conservative Party. Events proved that he was right. That seems a long way off to you now; but I can give you a link with the past which stretches still further back. It was when my father first took me to the House of Commons. Cobden had been making a very inflammatory speech about the Crimean War; but it was not the speeches which interested me so much as a chat that my father had with the doorkeeper. This man told him that he perfectly remembered the announcement in the House of the execution of Louis XVI. Every member wore black with the exception of Fox, who wore a red waistcoat.'

'You must tell that to Danny,' said Miranda, 'and he will tell it to his grandchildren ——'

'I can't bear coming up to London now,' sighed Lydia. 'All the old landmarks going: Devonshire House, Dorchester House, Regent Street gone; Portman Square, Park Lane going; and Conyngham Place turned into flats!'

'It's dreadful to have lost Devonshire House!' sighed Judy. 'Those lovely parties and all those beautiful women in tight waists and tiaras!'

'Women were prettier then, weren't they, Uncle Tom?' sighed Lydia. She caught a glimpse of her face in the glass; then looked away abruptly. Once she had been Uncle

Tom's favourite; of later years he had seemed to notice her less.

'Talking of historic changes,' said Miranda, 'who would ever have guessed that the hideous Hum — you remember Humphreys-Drew, Uncle Tom? — that shy, retiring little barrister who seemed predestined to failure, should be making twenty thousand a year and heading straight for the Woolsack!'

'Or that poor Daddles should have lost his job, his digestion, and his hair!' sighed Judy, as she thought of poor Peter, his lost place, and his lost future.

'Or that Daniel should have been knighted!' said Lydia, as she thought of poor John and how he had gone bankrupt before he died.

'Or that Paul Trotter should have married an Earl's daughter and got the V.C.!' said Judy.

'Or that Sir Deighton Stuart should have gone to the bad —' said Lydia tactlessly.

'Or Bobby Grant become a millionaire!' said Judy, kicking her under the table.

'Or that queer fellow Julian Carr should have made such a name for himself out in the East!' said Sir Thomas. There was a pause.

'Has he chucked it all up to become a monk?' asked Lydia lightly.

'Or a millionaire?' suggested Judy.

'He appears to have had an adventurous career,' said Sir Thomas, 'and to have played many parts. At one time, indeed, he seems to have played the part of king. A pity,' he added, 'that he has thrown it all away!'

'Well, Uncle Tom,' said Judy, rising, 'I hope you'll live to see a great many other changes equally surprising. I

must fly now — no, Lydia, you can't have any more cake — Uncle Tom, do restrain her greed! — And you must come and stay with the Duchess again very soon. I wish we could put you up, but I'm afraid you wouldn't find it so comfortable.'

Sir Thomas embraced his nieces and they all three left the house.

'Oh!' cried Lydia on the doorstep, 'what a wonderful evening it is! Couldn't we do something romantic together — go on the top of a bus to the Elephant and Castle, or the World's End —'

'The tops are all shut now,' Miranda reminded her.

Judy said, 'There won't be time!'

'Oh, blow punctuality for once!' cried Lydia. 'It's such years and years since we've had any fun!'

Impulsively she put her arms round her sisters and brought them face to face.

'Oh, Judy,' she thought, 'you're as lovely as ever. Miranda, you are still the most beautiful girl in the world!'

But between herself and her sisters she saw a host of faces, a procession of years; she felt her sisters both pulled away from her in opposite directions, pulled away from each other, away from their youth.

'I must catch the six-five,' said Judy. 'Bonny is bringing down half the Eton Eleven and I must fix up tents for them and get them something to eat —'

'I must get back,' said Miranda. 'It's Molly's night out and I have to give Danny his bath —'

'Oh, well,' said Lydia regretfully, 'I'll go back too.'

'There's my bus!' cried Judy.

'And there's mine!' said Miranda.

'Good-bye!'

'Good-bye!'

'Good-bye!'

Lydia stood for a moment on the pavement, looking after her sisters as they were whirled away in opposite directions till the traffic swallowed them up.

Then she pushed back her hat, fixed on her spectacles, and made with all haste for her train.

She just caught it and leaned back rather hot and red in the face.

Partings were always sad, she reflected; inevitable reminders of change and decay.

The train slid out of the station; passing buildings, passing backyards, ugly new houses, rows on rows . . .

Nothing lasted, she thought, as she watched them glide by. Human souls flashed into meaning for one brief hour; then failed and were lost. What ardours endured, what memories held true? Nothing lasted; no moment returned.

The train gathered speed. Leaving London it plunged into the deep green peace of the country. It was July. The hay was all mown; down by the river the lime trees were breaking their buds. In London the lime trees were already full out; shedding sweetness in dusty squares, deserted old gardens, perhaps . . .

Nothing stayed. The moment that once seemed eternal could die like a dream.

'There are no fields of amaranth on this side of the grave; there are no voices, O Rhodopè, that are not soon mute, however tuneful; there is no name with whatever emphasis of passionate love repeated, of which the echo is not faint at last.'

The train slid into a tunnel and all was obscured.

Nothing mattered. It came to that in the end. However

one struggled, wept, or prayed, nothing mattered. Not Love, with its rosy flame, nor cold philosophy, nor wealth, nor glory, nor impartial death, pitiless, all-conquering. Not the ant-like race of man, with its wasted heroism, its futile cruelty, its sublime sacrifices for the vain preservation of unmeaning existence. Not the earth, a fretful midge in the vast inane, spinning to its senseless end — a floating graveyard round an extinct sun. Not the blind Life Force, capriciously creating, unintelligently destroying. Not the Absolute — if there were an Absolute. Nothing mattered . . .

At the little wayside station the train slowed down and Lydia got out. The evening air smelled of newly cut clover. The hedges were wreathed with wild roses and twisting white briony: from the top of a larch tree two doves called 'prroo — prroo — —'

Crossing the archway she stood for a moment and watched the train trundle by: passing trees, passing farms, passing fields, to the indigo distance beyond. A white plume of smoke hung like a snake in the air; grew wraith-like, dissolved. The vanishing train sounded fainter, now louder, now fainter again; then turning a corner, was lost.

THE END

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THREE DAUGHTERS



JANE DASHWOOD

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THE *Grand Hôtel de Provence* was comfortably filled with a most variegated and interesting assortment of visitors. There were Miss Ffrench and Miss Forster, two ancient English ladies as alike as two beetles. There was the English family — Eveline Vereker, her beautiful daughter Victory, her two smaller children, and Peter Sellinger, their tutor. There was Laura Garden, thin, pale, shy, and romantic. There was Edward Houseman, tall, distinguished, an authority on mediæval history, and the object of Laura's adoration. And finally, there was Coucou — red head and red dress, brown bare arms and legs, the vitality of an untamed tiger cub.

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